

Biblical Flocks: One-Anothering

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 4:9-12

Stevan Vaughan

Introduction

I have grown up in different kinds of churches all of my life. Church life was a regular part of weekly life, but when I was a teenager I typically chose not to attend youth functions and Wednesday or Sunday evening church, usually because I just wanted to hang out at home. My father, being a social person, liked to go to church every time the doors opened and my mom, being more of a private person, really chose not to attend except for Sunday mornings. I tended to take after my mother when it came to church attendance. Besides, I was always told that you didn't have to go to church to be a Christian.

When Heidi and I married we knew church was important. In college we attended church regularly, but typically as it best fit into our schedule, there was never a sense of being a true part of a church community, because we were living in the Christian community at a Christian college and we had a strong support system at home. One exception to this pattern was when I was a staff youth pastor after college, and I had to be at every service. But because of Heidi's work and coaching schedule being at every church function actually seemed to cause a lot of stress. Erroneously, when I taught at Dayton Christian, I believed that since I was around Christians all day, day in and day out, this was the same as church community and therefore, being in Church at every service was not necessary. In fact often (I assume unintentionally), students treated school functions as a replacement for church functions, because all too often church functions were merely something else to do with Christian friends.

When Heidi and I started a family we knew being in church was vital for their Christian development. But the church we attended didn't have Sunday evening services so we practiced "family night" each and every Sunday night. We have always been very close to family and are blessed with multiple believers in our family, so often we fell in to the thinking that family was our main support and we really didn't need to get that plugged in at church. If we didn't get together with extended family on Sunday nights, we would take our kids on a hike or a fun family activity. To be honest, I loved these nights and still have fond memories of our time together as a family. In those early years we tried to have our children in Sunday school as much as possible, but often one of us (as parents) would have to stay home when the children were sick. I was a member of the church we attended and the deacon in charge of the church benevolent fund, and yet because of our close connection with the Christian school and our family we never felt the need to join the small group fellowship in the church or be at every service.

As our children grew older, and our extended family began to meet less often due to competing schedules and desires, and as my reconnection with Reformed theology grew, and the church we were attending began to slide more and more into a "seeker" emphasis in their teaching, and the Lord brought us to Clearcreek. One of the perceived needs we sought in a church change was true community (whatever that was). We were not exactly sure what we were looking for in community other than

we desired a smaller church where we could develop relationships on a more vulnerable and personal basis, grow in true biblical relationships, and also challenge our growing children's view of church community, which was anemic at best, sinful at the worst. But the Lord made it clear (particularly to my wife), that our perception of church community was not truly biblical.

We attended Clearcreek once and fell in love with the people and the preaching and committed to this body through church membership. We slowly became more and more committed to attending every service and fellowship we could, although I will admit, somewhat reluctantly at first. It is exciting to look back and see how the Holy Spirit worked in our lives, especially our older children who had grown up seeing a less involved family pattern in church. One of the most challenging gatherings for us to attend was Flock, primarily because of the busyness of the family during the week, work and growing athletic schedules. More and more the Lord has grown our understanding and love for community and especially for The Chapel family. We have grown to love every opportunity to meet together as fellow believers, especially in flock, because it is where true relationships and community are nurtured and grown and where biblical "one-anothering" truly begins to take place.

Paul helps us consider some characteristics of community that we can apply to flock fellowship here at the Chapel. Please turn to 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. This is what God's word says:

¹¹ *Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you,*
¹² *and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,* ¹³ *so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

Flocks are Christ-Centered and Christ-Focused (1 Thess. 3:11-13)

Paul's Transitional Prayer (v. 11-13)

About four weeks ago Russ preached a message titled "Our Glory and Joy". In that message he laid excellent ground work for my preaching today. He showed us that the people who Paul loved dearly and worked for with much effort became Paul's glory and joy. Paul lays the foundation of his desire and theology for these people with this recorded prayer in his first letter to the Thessalonian church.

Paul's Desire (v. 11)

Paul longed to visit the Thessalonians to encourage them and check on their growth and progress in the faith, but he also recognized that it was God's sovereignty (through affliction) that was keeping him from his listeners. But his true heart's desire was completely and passionately connected to the Thessalonian believers through great joy. What Paul desires for Thessalonians' maturity doesn't change merely because he is absent; in fact, his desire intensifies because he cannot be with them in person, thus, driving Paul on his knees in prayer for the Thessalonians growth and maturity. This joy and

intense love for one another is what we want to pursue in our relationships in community with one another.

Paul's Prayer for Love and Holiness (v. 12-13)

Paul makes his desire for his audience clear in his petition to God. He prays that God will make them increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as Paul has increased and grew in love for them. The New Living Translation reads in verse 12, "...may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow...." The key emphasis here is that we cannot grow our love for one another on our own will and strength, but Paul's prayer is that Christ would cause love for one another to grow and overflow! The emphasis is not on human ability but on Christ's grace in our lives. As we focus on Christ and love Christ, He will in fact grow our love for one another and for all people.

Paul's Eschatological Focus (v. 13)

We are to grow in love for one another in part because of Christ's future return. As we focus on Christ in our love for one another, Christ is establishing our hearts blameless in holiness for His future return with all of the saints. We are made holy by and through Christ alone, and this will be evident when Christ returns for his people whom He has set aside in holiness because of his work on the cross. The theme of holiness seems to glow in the foreground of Paul's prayer, with the idea of judgment of the unrighteous shadowing the background of the prayer.

Flocks are One another Oriented (1 Thess. 4:9-12)

Brotherly love is the effect of Christ-centered and Christ-focused fellowship. Brotherly love is to increase and expand as we focus more and more on Christ. As we grow in our love for Christ and our care for one another, we will love those inside and our church community and live honorably in our neighborhoods because of our love for others.

Let's read together 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12:

⁹Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Increasing in Conduct that Pleases the Lord (v. 9-10)

Paul leaves behind the apologetic concerns of the first three chapters of his letter and shifts to exhortation. Paul calls on the Thessalonians to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord in holiness and honor.

Holiness is the Standard

Holiness is the theme that is foreshadowed in Paul's prayer in 3:13; but holiness is also an Old Testament theme that Jewish believers would have easily understood. There are two major ideas under the theme of conduct pleasing to God that Paul brings out in this section of the Thessalonian letter. One is the necessity of sexual purity in the church and the other is the need to increase in brotherly love for one another. Holiness based on Old Testament law denotes purity and being set aside from the world, or being distinct; set aside for God's use and identification. Paul wanted the Thessalonians to live in holiness as God's own people and therefore be "set apart".

"This persistent emphasis on holiness reveals an important truth about the theological perspective from which Paul views the Thessalonian believers and issues his exhortations to them (Weima 1996, esp. 101-3). Holiness was the attribute by which Israel, God's covenant people, was to be distinguished from all other nations...The basic concept associated with this call to holiness is that of 'separation'-that is, the need for Israel to 'come out' and be 'distinct' from the surrounding peoples (Snaith 1944:24-32). Thus holiness is the boundary marker that separates God's people from all other nations." (Jeffery A. D. Weima, Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, Editors).

Brotherly Love Taught by God (v. 9)

Although sexual purity was a key concern as Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to walk in holiness and conduct pleasing to the Lord, this morning my chief concern is the second part of Paul's exhortation - to live a life pleasing to God and one that is continually increasing in brotherly love.

I like the wording in chapter 4:9 in the NLT: "But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another. "

How did God himself teach the Thessalonians to love one another? God used Paul's teachings, the co-workers he has sent to the Thessalonians, the teaching of the elders, prayer and God's word, the circumstances in which they were growing, and their affliction to contribute to their growth. This is how God himself was teaching and growing the Thessalonians.

We know from this letter to the Thessalonians that Paul gave thanks for the believers in Thessalonica. In the introduction to the letter Paul cites that they had been an example to all of Macedonia, and that the gospel had been preached and taught (in part through Paul's love and example), and through the power and full conviction of the Holy Spirit. The Thessalonians received the word in the midst of much affliction, with great joy, and patterned Paul's example of love to other churches throughout Macedonia.

Increasing Love More and More (v. 10)

Not only did the Thessalonians show love and support to other believers throughout Macedonia, but they did not keep gospel they received from God

to themselves, but imitated Paul throughout Macedonia and Achaia by giving of themselves and proclaiming the gospel in the Region. Chapter one says this... “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything,” But for all the work of spreading the gospel and loving one another that they were already doing, Paul exhorted them to increase in their love for one another even more!

How could Paul urge the Thessalonians to increase their love and care for one another, even in the midst of affliction and sacrifice? Haven’t they been commended enough? Where was this increase to come from? Paul’s prayer reminds them...” May the Lord make your love for one another grow and overflow...” As we focus all the more on Christ and ask for his love to grow in us for one another, may our love for one another and all people grow and overflow.

Walk Properly with Outsiders (v. 11-12)

Love for one another is not the only concern that Paul had for the Thessalonian church. They were to be dependent on Christ to provide the grace to grow more and more in love and service to one another, and they were also to live properly among unbelievers. Paul’s desire is that, just as holiness in the Old Testament meant to be set aside or distinct from other nations, so too does Paul expect believers to live holy, honorably, and distinctly among their neighbors, but distinct for the right reasons.

Ambition to Live Quietly (v. 11a)

It is interesting to note here the character qualities that Paul has in mind. Look at verse 11. “...and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you...” To aspire or have ambition to live a quiet life is an interesting paradox. The Greek word used here for aspire or ambition means *eager striving* (lit. *love for honor*). The NLT states it as “*make it your goal*”. “*To be quiet*” is not a command to silence, but is a warning against fanaticism, against “*advent fever,*” against the temptation of becoming busybodies (cf. 2 Thess. 3:11).¹

Mind Your Own Affairs (v. 11a)

There were some in the Thessalonian church who were not living quietly or minding their own affairs, but were in fact not working because of a false belief about the second coming of Christ. They were being busybodies and an irritant to those both in and outside the church. They were not living honorably and were not providing for themselves, but were depending on the work and generosity of others in an unbiblical way. As a modern application today, we need to be concerned about our reputation

¹Walter A. Elwell, vol. 3, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Baker reference library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989), 1 Th. 4:11.

among believers and unbelievers alike. We are supposed to be Word proclaiming people, not “cause” focused people. We need to be careful about the reputation of Christ, and what we represent to those who do not know Christ. It seems to be particularly easy in this country to allow our reputation to be shifted away from Christ and towards some other deed or cause that we care deeply about.

Work with Your Hands (v.11b)

The Thessalonian church was to follow Paul’s example that each believer should provide for their own individual physical needs. Paul wrote earlier in the letter that he worked hard day and night both to provide for his own needs and to proclaim the gospel without being dependent on, or being a burden to, anyone else in the church. Paul wanted believers to be honorable and industrious in their work, if they followed the example of Paul, they would not open themselves up to the criticism of fanaticism or extremism. Paul’s own example, while not subverting the church’s call to care for one another, was in stark contrast to those who were not working because of erroneous theological beliefs.

No Dependency outside the Body (v.12)

Paul didn’t want the church to be dependent on anyone but the Lord and the body, but due to false teaching there were many who were taking advantage of their brothers and sisters because they felt they did not need to work because the return of Christ was imminent. Such an attitude and lifestyle was clearly not honoring the body of Christ.

Review and Application:

Flocks are to be Christ-centered and Christ-focused, not focused on man, goals, fellowship, desires in common, works, or deeds.

Christ alone provides the grace for us to grow in love for one another, which we are to be continually increasing. This love for one another begins by pursuing and loving Christ.

We are to be a holy and honorable people set apart for Christ’s work.

We are to walk properly among unbelievers, minding our own business, and not being an irritant or busybody. This means we are to be primarily gospel-focused, not “cause” focused. In other words, while a political cause, food pantries for the poor, a love for home schooling, etc. may all be good causes; these are not reasons for biblical community or Flock fellowship.

Live quietly, mind your own affairs, work with your hands, and be dependent on no one outside the Body of Christ.

Our primary ministry to our neighborhood should be Word ministry, just like the Thessalonians, and even in severe affliction. Christ will be glorified and honored in our Flocks as we love one another and present the life changing message of the gospel to those in our neighborhoods.

So how do these Biblical principles inform Flocks here at the Chapel?

Application

Flocks at the Chapel

Clearcreek Chapel is a gathered church made up of people who live together in geographical neighborhoods and communities. We share our lives together in flocks with shepherds over us and servants among us. We also meet together for corporate worship, hearing the Word, ordinances, and other church-wide efforts in ministry.

Values

There are many verses that have informed our model for Flock ministry, but I wanted to place a few specific verses on the overhead that you might want to write down. Pray and reflect on Acts 2:44; 20:20-21, 28; Ephesians 1:15-19; 3:14-19; Hebrews 10: 23-25 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. We identify these values as shaping our Flock ministry.

Shepherding

We value the importance of elders/pastors shepherding the church at the personal, face-to-face level.

Community

We value being together as believers in terms of community and our shared life in Christ with one another.

Fellowship

We value the sweetness of our fellowship as believers with God and one another around shared meals, talk and recreation.

Praying Together

We value the greatness of our privilege to pray to God together over our life together, its needs, problems, heartaches, pressures and praises.

Practical Care

We value the unity, opportunity and challenges of helping one another in practical ways and expressing our love for God through sacrificial deeds of love for one another.

Mission

The Chapel Flocks' Mission is to cultivate and sustain Biblical shepherding, life, fellowship and ministry at the neighborhood level. Remember that the Thessalonian church was known for their Word ministry throughout all of the surrounding regions. For our purposes, Flock ministry begins at the neighborhood level.

Vision

The vision for Flocks is this:

To establish, as the primary Chapel family ministry unit, community based and geographically defined flocks.

To place over each Flock an elder who shall shepherd that Flock according to the Word of God.

To meet together regularly for study, prayer, fellowship, one-anothering ministry and outreach.

To cultivate loving and caring relationships for discipleship, training and mutual care.

To establish evangelistic beachheads in each community in which the Chapel families live.

Strategy

Identification

We often mention geographical divisions for Flock. Chapel ministry is generally divided into geographical or community areas, identifying these areas as a Flock area. Typically, there will be at least one elder assigned over the families living in this area, identifying him as that Flock's Shepherd. We identify the Chapel families that live in those areas and communicate to them who their Shepherd is and who are in their Flock. One important change in this area that came out of our Elder's retreat is that geographical division is only a guideline and not a rule when it comes to flock division. Flocks may be adjusted based upon giftedness and ministry needs that may become evident over a period of time, but geographic division is our starting point for Flock division.

Instruction

From time to time the elders will set aside a Sunday and designate this as Chapel Flock Sunday. We will use the morning message to communicate the Biblical principles and values that shape Flocks. Like this morning, our desire is to use this time to inform and encourage all the Chapel families to embrace the principles. Typically, we might use the evening message to lay out the practical implications for all the families and solicit a commitment to be personally involved. This morning we are doing both during the morning service and will have a question and answer session regarding all of the sermons in our Shepherds and Servants series tonight.

You may not realize how many new members and participants have come through our doors in a fairly short period of time. They may not understand why or how we have plurality of elders and how Flock ministry works, thus we will have periods of instruction like this morning's service.

Implementation Emphasis

Our desire and intention is that Flock meetings will emphasize relationships, fellowship, and mutual care. Flock meetings often will include a short Bible study, but the Flock's overarching emphasis should be on sharing, prayer requests, prayer together, and then a lesson from the Word. Flock is intended to be the primary means to grow in relationships and one-anothering. The secondary purpose would be to review the Sunday morning message, with an emphasis on considering the practical application and answering questions that may have arisen from the previous Sunday morning's message.

Environment

It is our desire to really work hard to create a warm and welcoming environment in order to draw people to attend and become enthusiastic about the fellowship and ministry of Flock. Elders, deacons and Flock participants are to be hospitable and continually strive to grow in the development of love and hospitality.

Meeting

Flocks meet each week on a weekday evening in the home of a member of the Flock. Since I have been a member these meetings have been on Wednesday evenings.

On each fifth Wednesday of a month, the Elders and their families meet as an Elder's Flock.

Fellowship and community are best developed around meals shared together and major effort should be made to have a regular meal together and if at all possible, every week. Meals are times to eat, talk and build relationships. The responsibility to provide the meal builds team work, commitment and an appreciation for one another's labors for the whole. I know organization of Flock meals can raise a variety of opinions from shepherd and sheep alike, but you cannot argue with the fact that meal time increases fellowship. I know we are working hard in Southeast Flock to slowly implement and increase our meal times together because of the increased sharing that takes place over meals. Each individual Flock elder, along with input from his Flock, manages a variety of fellowship opportunities surrounding meals and snacks. But all the while the desire and plan is to grow in love and care for one another more and more!

Shepherding

Besides fellowship surrounding meals and snacks, Flock is the perfect place to teach, challenge and confront one another in regards to life and ministry together. While the Elders take Flock ministry very seriously in regards to discipleship opportunities, regular Christian disciplines and duty can most easily be explained at the Flock level and exhortation of one another in both group and one-on-one opportunity is best suited at Flock.

Discipleship

Therefore, personal and small group discipleship should be modeled and encouraged at the Flock level. This is the place where relationships are most likely to be cultivated for Titus 2 ministry between our more mature and our younger believers. Flock is also vital soil for recognizing and growing qualified men to become future deacons and elders of the church. Flock is the primary means of training new men into leadership roles as well as recognizing and training deacons and deaconess' for serving at both the Flock and corporate levels of ministry.

Outreach

While the primary emphasis of Flock is growing and improving relationships and the body life of our church, Flock should be a time and place where the lost are invited and welcomed warmly. It is imperative that Flocks be evangelistic and outward reaching. In this day of isolation and loneliness, the richness of Christian fellowship is a powerful evangelistic opportunity. The primary emphasis for flocks will remain building and strengthening the body through prayer, community, mercy ministries, and fellowship.

Flocks may at times be a vehicle or catalyst for other ministries, but these would be a secondary purpose.

Mutual Care

Because Flock is the primary means of practical care for one another, the Flock should be the first line of diaconal and benevolence care. Hospital visits, care for new mothers and those suffering illness, meeting practical needs, visiting and encouraging the widows and shut-ins shall begin and be primarily the responsibility of the Flock. This may be a shift in thinking for many of our new members and visitors, but while we will continue to have corporate benevolence, it is our primary intent to meet needs where we can through our flocks. A Flock typically will identify men and women who are willing to lead and organize diaconal and benevolent care.

Flocks Further Fulfilling Purpose

One more characteristic that came out of Elder's retreat is what we call "Flocks Further Fulfilling Purpose." It is the Chapel's intention to strategically multiply flocks for the purpose of multiplying gospel witness in communities. Multiplication may also result from the need to reduce the size of a flock for more effective one-anothering. Flocks will be annually reviewed for multiplication through splitting as a matter of course. However, this would not prevent the multiplying of a flock at the elders' discretion at other times. When starting another flock, it is possible that families be brought together from several flocks to create a strategic mix of locality and giftedness. The elders also see the possibility of deacons leading flocking meetings in the future where there is need and intention.

So again, geographical division is the starting place for Flock division, Flock size, multiplication potential, giftedness of members, and needs of the Flocks are all factors that may cause the elders to move Flocks and/or individual families as needed.

Community (in conclusion)

So what is the difference between what I used to believe about Christian community and Flock? Are both Christ focused versus "cause" focused? Do both meet needs of believers? Do both groups worship together? Is there a pastor under the authority of the church that shepherds the sheep? Are both views Word focused in the proclamation of the gospel, or is there some other commonality that holds the group together?

Flock is church. There is a pastor and sheep, ministry of the word and the ministry of counseling and fellowship with one another, with a focus on discipleship and growing together in our desire for and worship of Christ alone.

The longer I have been here at the Chapel and spend time with the elders in the Word and in my own study of scripture, the more I see the Church body as life and not a place or location or even a time on my schedule. Instead of seeing church community as being something my family participates in, now I see my family as an organic part of church community. Therefore, my view of church and family has completely been turned on its head, I believe God would desire that we continue to live and grow with this model in mind. Community is not a place to go but who we are in Christ. Just as Paul drew an illustration in Thessalonians from the Old Testament community in being “set apart” for Christ, we too are Christ’s body, his community, one family set apart for Word ministry. May God continue to give us the grace necessary to continue to grow in our understanding and implementation of community both corporately and in Flock ministry, and may that begin today and this week.



Title
Text
Speaker

The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

Requests for CD/ tapes or questions about this message may be directed to the church office at (937) 885-2143
or through e-mail at thePulpit@ClearcreekChapel.org.

The *English Standard Version* is generally used in our pulpit ministry.

Introduction

Heading

➤ **Heading**

Heading

Conclusion