

GOVERNING VALUES OF EBC (PART 2)

DECEMBER 11, 2022

This is part 2 of a message I began last week called, “Governing Values of EBC,” values that we as elders have prayerfully crafted as part of our Vision Planning sessions over the last several months. Our vision is “That Christ would be seen by all.” That Christ would be seen by *us* as a church as we gather to worship, pray, and fellowship with one another. That Christ would be seen by our community as they encounter Him in us at school, at work, in the marketplace, in our community events and activities. That Christ would be seen by those who don’t yet know Him as we live and preach the Gospel both here and abroad.

Our mission is “to bring glory and pleasure to Christ Jesus by expressing His life, obeying His will, and advancing His kingdom.” Pastor Grant spent three weeks in November explaining each of these phrases, showing us their biblical roots, why they are Jesus’ priorities for us, and what they look like as we practice them together.

I was assigned to share the *values* that guide our decisions, that determine our policies, procedures, and protocols, and that govern our attitudes and behavior when we are together so that Christ would, indeed, be seen by all. We have a total of seven stated values. I provided some explanation and commentary on the first two last week, and I will address the remaining five this morning. Let’s briefly review the first two.

As the Body of Christ at EBC, we value... **Worship**: *we strive to bring pleasure and glory to Jesus in all we do.* Last week I tried to show you from Scripture that ultimate reality is Christocentric. Everything in this universe *revolves around* Jesus, everything is *about* Jesus, everything is *by* Jesus, and everything is *for* Jesus. Colossians 1 tells us that, “*we were created through Him and for Him,*” and Ephesians 1 tells us that everything that God has done in history is “*for the praise of Jesus’ glory*” (1:6, 12,14).

Thus, Paul would say, ¹⁷ *...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col. 3:17).* Do it for Him. Do it so that He will be pleased. Do it so that He will be honored. This is worship, and this is EBC’s first and greatest value. That every decision that is made, every service that is planned, every meeting that is conducted, every ministry that is performed, every activity that is done brings Jesus glory and pleasure.

Our second value regarding Scripture is nearly as important. *The Bible is our Supreme source of truth, informing all our decisions and documents.* We take the Bible very seriously, and we work hard and do our best to interpret it accurately. We also believe that “*All Scripture is breathed out (inspired) by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be **complete**, equipped for every good work.*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Being complete is God’s will for every one of us. Paul made it his ambition to “*make the word of God fully known...warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature (complete) in Christ*” (Col. 1:25, 28).

Our third value is **prayer**. *We devote ourselves to prayer.* This has been part of our DNA for many years and must continue to be part of our DNA if we are going to fulfill our vision and mission—that Christ would be seen by all, and that we will bring glory and pleasure to Him by expressing His life, obeying His will, and advancing His kingdom. We believe prayer is so essential to the health, well-being, and effectiveness of EBC that every decision and activity must be rooted in and borne out of prayer.

Here's why: Prayer is a declaration of dependence on Jesus. It is an acknowledgement that we are weak and He is strong, that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:4), that we need His blessing, His wisdom, His guidance, His resources, and His enablement for every single thing we do as a church. It is also a recognition that prayer moves the hands of God. Jesus said, ⁷ *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”* ⁸ *“For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened (Matt. 7:7-8).”*

In the Greek language, these imperatives, “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” are emphatic. We could best understand Jesus on this matter if we were to put an exclamation mark at the end of each word. Jesus is saying, “When you have needs and concerns don’t just sit there wringing your hands or biting your fingernails. Your heavenly Father, who has every resource at His disposal and is incredibly generous with them, is poised to bless you! So, what are you waiting for? Ask! Seek! Knock!”

Paul said something similar when he admonished the Colossians to *“...be devoted to prayer” (4:2)*. The Greek word translated “devoted” is the strongest word in that language for commitment. It means “to latch on to something and refuse to let it go”, like a pit bull seizing a piece of meat.

Furthermore, the tense of the verbs in **verse 8** indicate that this is not an isolated, one-time petition. It is not a couple of halfhearted raps on the door and, if no one opens it, you say, “Oh well, I guess nobody’s home, I’ll stop knocking.” This is continuous action. You could legitimately translate this, “Keep on asking, keep on seeking, don’t stop knocking until the door is opened.” Jesus is describing tenacity.

As elders we are committed to being devoted to prayer. To never start or end a meeting without praying. To never make any plans or decisions without first seeking the Lord. To never counsel or deal with a conflict or a crisis without asking for wisdom and asking the Lord to preside over those conversations and encounters. To never make financial decisions or recommendations without first saturating the matter in prayer.

That is how we will lead this church. We want to lead by example, but we also want to gently but firmly insist that anyone in a position of influence be devoted to prayer as well. It is absolutely imperative for the health and well-being of our church.

Our fourth value is Unity. *We hold firmly to the doctrines we consider to be absolute, while respecting different convictions and preferences.* Absolutes are beliefs that are essential to the Faith and that are either clearly stated in Scripture or can be clearly deduced from Scripture. They are doctrines that are essential to orthodoxy, and therefore, we cannot and will not budge in our affirmation and acceptance of them.

Some examples of absolutes are the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the Trinity, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, salvation by faith in Jesus alone, the Second Coming of Christ, the inspiration of Scripture. We reject any doctrine or assertion that denies, contradicts, or dilutes these absolutes.

Convictions, on the other hand, are settled beliefs that are not essential to the Faith that come from reasoned interpretation of Scripture. They are matters addressed in Scripture in which thoughtful Bible students and scholars have tried to rightly divide the Word (2 Tim. 2:15) and have come up with different conclusions as to its interpretation. Examples of this are the time of Christ’s return, the day of the week to worship, the eternal security of the believer (or not), the mode of baptism, and the role of women in the church.

We do not divide on these matters. In fact, we not only tolerate those who disagree with us on these convictions, we encourage healthy and constructive dialogue on our

differences, and we respect those differences in one another. We believe this is honoring and pleasing to the Lord of our church, Jesus.

That's because Scripture tells us that the unity of the church is one of Jesus' greatest passions and priorities. In John 17, just a few hours before He was crucified, Jesus was praying. He began by praying for His disciples, but then in verse 20 He transitions to praying for all who would believe in Him, which includes us. **Verses 21-23**, ²¹ *[I pray] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* ²² *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,* ²³ *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

If our oneness with each other is Jesus' passion and priority, and if He prayed so fervently that we would be one, you can be sure that it is possible. He has made a way and given us every resource so that we can experience the kind of oneness He desires, even when we have significant differences.

So, we, in the words of Paul to the Ephesians, will *"[be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* He uses a word that means "to guard" or "to watch over." Paul is asking the Ephesians to protect and preserve the unity that God established. Why? I can think of a lot of reasons, but none is greater than that our unity brings Jesus enormous pleasure.

Since our mission is to bring glory and pleasure to Jesus, that is reason enough to be devoted, dedicated, and diligent to protect and preserve unity in our body. We must be very careful not to allow anything to interfere with or intrude upon our unity—that we recognize those interferences and intrusions promptly and deal with them swiftly.

This means that if there is tension or turmoil, we are committed to addressing it in a timely manner. We will not procrastinate, sweep it under the rug, wait until it blows over, or hope it goes away by itself if we ignore it long enough. We will address it immediately and constructively.

The fifth value is **Christlikeness**. *We strive to display the fruit of the Spirit and humility in all our conversations and interactions.* Scripture informs us that God's agenda for every single follower of Jesus is to conform him/her to the character of Christ. That's called sanctification, and it is a lifelong process that will not be completed until we see Jesus. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians, ¹⁸ *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory. (2 Cor. 3:18).*

Our job as elders is to help facilitate this transformation into the likeness of Christ for all of you. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, compared his pastoral role in their lives to that of a mother in labor, struggling and persevering until Christ was formed in them (4:19).

What does it look like to be conformed to the image of Christ? Paul tells us later in Galatians: *"...Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"* (5:25).

Our sixth value is **discipleship**. *We make disciples in our church, community, and world.* This relates to the portion in our mission statement that we will bring glory and pleasure to Jesus by...advancing His kingdom. Kingdom advancement in Jesus' kingdom has nothing to do with geopolitics or territorial dominion. It has to do with human beings.

That is why, when Jesus commissioned His disciples just before He ascended into heaven, He did not say to them, "Go and conquer kingdoms and nations. He said, ¹⁹ *Go...and make disciples of all nations...*" (Matt. 28:19). That is His agenda for the church in this age.

And that is our stated agenda as well, reflected in this value. We are committed to disciple-making, both locally and globally, and that value will be reflected in our teaching, in our activities, in our allocation of financial resources, and in just about everything we do.

Finally, we value **People**: *we value every person as made in the image of God and every Christ-follower as an essential part of His body.* To value means to honor and esteem, and when we say we value *every person* we mean just that. So, we're not just talking about valuing people who look like us, talk like us, act like us, or think like us. We're not talking merely about valuing people who share the same worldview, the same values, the same theology, or the same political persuasions. We're talking about valuing *every* single human being.

- Red, yellow, black, brown, and white—we will treat persons of every race or color with honor and dignity, because every person has been created by God in His image, and is, therefore, precious to Him.
- Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, animists, and atheists. While we don't agree with their beliefs or theology, we will honor and esteem such persons because they have been made by God in His image and are, therefore, precious to Him.
- Male, female, and those who say they don't know, because even those who don't know that God made them exactly the way they are and think they have the right to be something different, are precious to Him, and therefore, are precious to us.
- Conservatives and liberals, even those who are far left or far right, because all have been made by God in His image and are, therefore, precious to Him.
- Those who have traditional family values, and those who are part of the LGBTQ community, because all have been made by God in His image and are, therefore, precious to Him.
- Young and old, rich, and poor. We will treat everyone with equal esteem and honor and will not be partial to one over the other because all have been made by God in His image and all are equally precious to Him.
- People with disabilities, people with mental health issues. We will treat all with dignity and honor because each has been made by God in His image and is, therefore, precious to Him.

Jesus hung out with those who were despised, He befriended former harlots, He touched those who were unclean, He beckoned little children to come and sit in His lap, He dined with outcasts, He had theological conversations with heretics, He washed the feet of those who betrayed Him and denied Him. Jesus is our model. We will attempt to treat every person just like Jesus treated them—as individuals who have inherent dignity and honor because they have been made by God in His image.

So, we will treat every person with respect. We will speak the truth, but we will do so in love. We won't talk down to anyone, we won't despise anyone, and we won't turn anyone away or shut anyone out.

These are our governing values. This is how we have tried to lead, and this is how we will lead going forward. Pray for us—the elders. We desperately need the Lord's wisdom and help.

Governing Values of EBC (part 2)

Main Idea: The following values will guide our decisions, determine our policies, procedures, and protocols, and govern our attitudes and behavior so that Christ would be seen by all.

Seven Governing Values

1. **Worship:** we strive to bring pleasure and glory to Jesus in all we do.

2. **Scripture:** the Bible is the supreme source of truth, informing all our decisions and documents.

3. **Prayer:** we devote ourselves to prayer.

4. **Unity:** we hold firmly to the doctrines we consider to be absolute, while respecting different convictions and preferences.

5. **Christlikeness:** we strive to display the fruit of the Spirit and humility in all our conversations and interactions.

6. **Discipleship:** we make disciples in our church, community, and world.

7. **People:** we value every person as made in the image of God and every Christ-follower as an essential part of His body.