Healthy Churches

(by Carl McMurray)

Among church growth students over the last three decades there has been a consensus that church growth parallels church health. Like any physical body, when there is good health & the absence of disease and hindrances, growth naturally follows. A recent article I noticed followed up on this idea, 7 Secrets of Healthy Churches, by Thom S. Rainer. Although I don’t believe these are “secrets,” putting my own spin on his main ideas, I do believe he makes valid points when he says that healthy churches...

**Possess leadership and membership that have a high view of Scripture…** If we are not always holding up the Word, we will soon lose our focus on it in the distractions of this world. **2 Timothy 2:15**

**Seek to be relevant…** We can’t help others with the gospel of salvation if we don’t speak their language or understand their needs. It’s NOT 1965! The culture is not the same as it was. **1 Cor. 9:19-22**; **10:33**

**Hold to the primacy of preaching…** That is the method God chose for saving men. Shall we trade it for entertainment? Should we compress the meat out for a diet drink of milk? **1 Corinthians 1:21**

**Have a healthy, small group structure…** It is in the relationship of small groups that we have the opportunity to ask questions, confess ourselves, and build relationships with others. Bible classes, contact groups, home studies or hospitality opportunities; those who don’t use small groups lose their ties to their brethren and opportunities to grow spiritually. **Ephesians 4:16**

**Emphasize corporate prayers and the ministry of prayer…** Prayer is a fear killer and confidence builder. It is direct, heart-to-heart communication with our Father. It becomes the ability to see God working for us and with us. Jesus said it was the way that our Father gave us good gifts. **Matthew 7:7-11**; **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

**Take membership seriously…** Membership without accountability and responsibility is not membership at all—it is visiting! Healthy churches know the difference between members and visitors and act on that difference. Christians are not orphans and should not be acting like we have no family. **Acts 9:26-28**

**Are highly intentional about evangelism…** Healthy churches are motivated by heaven and hell to reach out to a lost world. Bible classes, advertising, outreach, and planning all have as their impetus sharing the good news of Jesus the Christ. **John 4:34-35**

*Are you a member of a healthy church?* ***What are you doing to make it more so?***

Should God Expect Less?

(by Paul R. Blake)

We as a nation have certain expectations of government. We pay taxes with the expectation that government will use those funds honestly. We expect our leaders to protect the civilian population from military oppressors & to render assistance to our friends. We respect & comply with civil law, and expect our government to punish those who do not. We require fairness in government, and we want our judges to render consistent verdicts. We expect our leaders to be examples for the rest of the population, living above reproach and scandal.

However, we have come to the point where we will settle for much less than we expect. We pay taxes knowing full well that some of those funds are going to be misused or given away to undeserving, mismanaged corporations and to persons who refuse honest labor. We witnessed our executive branch of government eviscerate the military and ignore the suffering of our international friends. Though we obey the laws, we know that many others will not, and that our judges will not punish the wicked and violent. Though we treat others with fairness, we continually see judges and political leaders treat special interest groups and outspoken minorities with blatant partiality. To cap it off, we have government leaders who used their office to fornicate, steal from tax payers, cheat in business, and to tell lies. We now expect less from our government even though we have given up much more of our time, money, and rights to it.

But before we get to feeling self-righteous toward civil government, we need to ask ourselves whether or not God has come to expect less of us than He once expected in the past. Some professed Christians seem to think so, or at least, they certainly are giving Him less than He expects.

God outlined His expectations for His children in His word (**2 Timothy 3:14-17**). He expects His children to be honest stewards of what He has given them, using their means wisely that they might have somewhat to give to the church and to the needy. He expects His children, in their capacity as the Lord's army, to fight valiantly against sin and to gather in souls for the Kingdom. He expects His children to respect all of His laws without partiality, including the commands to study and assemble. God expects His children to live above the immorality of the world, setting an example of purity and quality of character.

Yet based upon the examples of some, God simply must lower His expectations. We have become addicted to the “good life” of materialism and must work extra hours to pay for it; so, God must expect to see less of us at worship and Bible classes. We maintain high debt and must pay our bills, so God must expect less in the collection plate. We have little time or interest in Bible study at home or at services, therefore are unprepared to do battle with sin and are poor soldiers in soul winning skirmishes. God will simply have to find others more capable and get used to expecting fewer victories on the front lines. We live in an amoral world full of constantly shifting values, and we have absorbed the world's attitudes toward evil. God is just going to have to accept our garments of white with a few yellow stains and dingy gray collars. He really doesn't expect us to be an example that will lead the lost to Christ. God may have to revise what He wants of the 21st century Christian and learn to expect less. *Nonsense!*

In **Psalm 50:16-23**, God upbraids His children of Israel by asking, ***"What right do you have to declare My statutes or take My covenant into your mouth?"*** He tells them that they have been involved in thievery, adultery, dishonesty, and gossip, and He says, ***"These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought that I was... like you. But I will reprove you... consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces... To him that orders his conduct aright, I will show the salvation of God."*** God is not going to accept less, because He said He was not going to accept less *(****Luke 17:10****;* ***1 Peter 4:18****;* ***Heb. 12:1-4****;* ***Rom. 12:1-2****;* ***Luke 14:15-24****;* ***2 Tim. 3:1-5****;* ***Titus 1:16****,* ***3:8****;* ***Matthew 7:21-23****;* ***1 Cor. 15:58****).*

God isn’t going to expect less or accept less from us than our all. May we become wise to this fact before another week passes. May we live up to God's expectations rather than hoping that He will lower His expectations of what He wants of us. Pray for the strength to become more than just a name on a membership roster. Study to develop a head full of Bible knowledge and a heart filled with the wisdom of God. And then walk, not like the weak and worldly, but rather like our Savior Jesus.