

I. Introduction

- A. Visiting a new church that you know nothing about can be daunting
 - 1. Anytime anyone new comes through our doors, two things are true
 - a. **First**, they are there because they are in some way looking God
 - b. **Second**, they will be more than a bit uncomfortable and awkward
 - 1) It's true for full-on extroverts; it's especially true for introverts
 - 2) If someone visits, a desire for God overcomes their discomfort
 - 2. Keep that in mind while I tell you a true story of one church visitor
 - a. Woman visited church, and she seemed particularly out of place
 - b. Woman was obviously uncomfortable and stopped to talk at door
I wanted to visit your church. My wife is waiting for me in the car; before I bring her in, I wanted to make sure we'd be welcomed here.
 - 1) Well, she wasn't welcomed or made to feel at all comfortable
 - 2) What she got was just a terse, "*We just go by the Bible here*"
 - 3. The message to her was crystal clear, "*You aren't welcome here*"
 - a. It was also terribly wrong; that's not going right by the Bible
 - b. The Jesus of the Bible had a reputation of welcoming anyone
 - 1) Those uncomfortable around Jesus were good "church folks"
 - 2) But the sinners that they rejected flocked to be near Jesus
- B. We're ending the year by looking ahead to next year– *2020 Vision*
 - 1. What do we see this church becoming in the year and years ahead?
 - a. Where do we see God leading? What kind of church will we be?
 - b. If we don't know where we're going, how will we know we're there?
 - 2. Sometimes you check your GPS to find out where you are going
 - a. Sometimes you check the GPS to see how you are doing (ETA)
 - b. We're using our mission/vision statement as a GPS in this series
Living as God's family under the cross: Loving, Serving, Praising, Proclaiming
 - 1) We've seen what it means to be family and under the cross
 - 2) What exactly does it mean to live under the cross as loving?

II. God's Loving Family Under the Cross

- A. When I was in graduate school, my major professor emphasized debate
 - 1. I never had to do a term paper for him; I prepared a debate notebook
 - a. It wasn't just the notebook; you had to debate him in class
 - b. Whatever view you took, he would take the other– he always won
 - 1) The more foolish he made you look, the lower your grade
 - 2) He had some guys so twisted up, were on the verge of tears
 - 2. I learned a lot from his class... but not what he would have liked
 - a. What I learned was that debate is largely a huge waste of time
 - b. Debate is debate is more about who is the best debater than truth
 - 1) Dr. Warren convinced us to be atheists and then Mormons
 - 2) It didn't have anything to do with truth– the nature of debate
- B. Did Jesus ever debate? Yes, but pay care attention who he debated
 - 1. He never debated sinful people who were honest looking for God
 - a. He patiently sat down and taught them with stories and parables
 - b. In fact, very often Jesus say down and had lunch with them
 - 2. Jesus reserved debate for the religious leaders with all the answers
 - a. They attacked him because he didn't follow all their traditions
 - b. They attacked him because he attacked some of those traditions
 - c. They attacked him most of all because so many were listening
 - 3. One of the main reasons they attacked was he accepted everone
 - a. They constantly called him out on it (**Lk 5:30**; **7:39**; **15:1-2**)
 - b. They saw holiness as depending on isolation and quarantine
 - 1) Much like leprosy, you caught sin by hanging around sinners
 - 2) They preserved their holiness by not being around sinners
 - c. But Jesus rubbed elbows with sinners, and they just didn't get it
 - 4. Jesus had the reputation of being a safe place for sinners to be
 - a. They wanted to be around him and they listened to him
 - b. The church must have that reputation if we are to follow Jesus
 - c. We're to be known, not for who we exclude but who we include

C. So... what is the reputation with outsiders that the church has today?

1. Dave Kinnaman (Barna) published the book entitled *UnChristian*
 - a. How do the unchurched, especially young adults, see the church?
 - b. He says our reputation, to use his title, is decidedly “*UnChristian*”
 - 1) **Anti-Homosexual**: That was the number one thing on the list
 - 2) **Judgmental**: We’ve come to be known by what we’re against
 - 3) **Hypocrites**: Not done a spectacular job living what we believe
 - 4) **Too Political**: Identity of the church merges with the GOP
2. Some of that is the result of how the church is portrayed in media
 - a. We’ve come by some of those old-fashioned way, we earned it
 - b. We’d all agree that this is NOT the reputation we should have

D. Jesus is clear what should be the reputation of his disciples

1. World will know we are disciples by our love (**John 13:34-35**)
 - a. How is this new? Jesus said love was the greatest OT command
 - b. If I told you I bought a new car, that might mean several things
 - 1) It may mean you start to wonder if you’re paying me too much
 - 2) It might mean a 2020 new car; it may mean a “new to me” car
 - 3) What if it burns hydrogen it sucks out of air? *New kind of car*
 - c. We’re to love others “*as I have loved you.*” A new kind of love!
 - 1) Jews knew they were to, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*”
 - 2) But what were they taught that this meant? (**Matt 5:43-45**)
 - d. Jesus shows us a whole different kind of love (**John 15:12-13**)
2. When we love others, we make God’s love complete (**1 Jn 4:11-12**)
 - a. God’s love is made complete (perfect) when we love other people
 - b. **Later**: How can we love God who we don’t see if we don’t love...
 - c. Until we spread the love of God to others, it remains incomplete
3. This call to love others extends outside the building (**1 Thess 3:12**)
 - a. We are to be known as people who love each other and everyone
 - b. We are do good for everyone (especially the household of faith)
 - c. We’re known as the people of God because we show love of God

III. Conclusion

- A. What's the point? What does it say about a "2020 Vision" for Denbigh?
1. I'm not suggested that we soft-pedal truth or downplay the Bible
 - a. I'm not saying we avoid certain things so everyone will like us
 - b. The point isn't that we become so open-minded our brains fall out
 - c. We must speak the truth in love, but we can't do that without love
 - 1) I cringe if one starts, "*I'm just speaking truth in love here....*"
 - 2) Why? Because so often what follows is anything but loving!
 2. We must teach what Bible teaches, but one of those things is love!
 - a. I once preached sermon on hell– on a Sunday night (long ago)
 - 1) Someone, "*I really enjoyed that...*" (*bad sign if you enjoy hell*)
 - 2) Then said, "*I just get so tired of all those love-type sermons*"
 - b. I wanted to say, "*You'll have to take that up with management*" (*Jesus never said that the greatest commandment of the Law is about hell*)
 - c. If we're going to teach what the Bible teaches, we'll teach love
 3. Of course, being for love does mean that turn a blind eye to sin
- B. Someone has suggested that we must "*love the sinner and hate the sin*"
1. That is usually attributed to Gandhi, although Augustine said it first
 - a. We're to love what God loves (*people*), hate what He hates (*sin*)
 - b. While technically true, we don't apply it consistently or lovingly
 2. **Question:** Do we hate sin... or just some of the sins in other people?
 - a. When Christians stand against sin, why is it against sin out there?
 - b. Many churches have taken stands again homosexual marriage
 - 1) Christian bakers refuse to do wedding cakes for gay weddings
 - 2) Why don't we take stands on greed, pride, lust, envy, gluttony?
 - c. A report appeared in Houston Chronicle on sex abuse in SBC
 - 1) Report uncovered 380 church leaders and 700 abuse victims
 - 2) Why has no one refused to bake cakes for Southern Baptists?
 - d. It seems that our "hate the sin" outrage is usually pretty selective
 3. Paul tells us to worry more about our own sins (**1 Cor 5:11-12**)

C. **Question:** Am I loving the sinner if I make no effort at a relationship?

1. Granted, it's not loving to allow one to continue their way to hell
 - a. To accept everyone as OK and say nothing is ultimately unloving
 - b. So why don't we stop people on the street and say, "Repent!"
 - 1) Because they won't listen! We must build a relationship first
 - 2) And that is the whole point of really loving the sinner
 - c. The church is to be a place where people are drawn to Christ
2. I started today with the church and homosexuality— let me end there
 - a. There are three basic positions that the church can take on issue
 - 1) **Affirming:** These churches say homosexuality is good & holy
 - 2) **Non-Affirming:** These churches say just the opposite
 - 3) **Accepting:** These see it as sin, but accept people where they are
 - b. My vision for the church at Denbigh is that we be accepting
 - 1) Not just for homosexual people, but for all sinful people
 - 2) I want the church here to be a safe place for all sinful people
3. Let me end with a story that I shared on Wednesday night
 - a. A lesbian married couple started attending an accepting church
 - b. The Church believed that homosexuality is against scripture
 - 1) Church knew the couple; they knew what the church believed
 - 2) They developed relationships; they attended there for 20 years
 - 3) They finally renounced their lifestyle and pledged to celibacy
 - c. Question: What if line had been drawn in the sand at beginning?
4. Maybe the whole point isn't "love the sinner and hate the sin."
 - a. Maybe it's just "Love... and pointing people to Jesus."
 - b. That means granting people as much grace and time as they need