

## Being a Biblically Normal Church

(Non-series, topical message, various passages)

What is a “normal church”? For many people, the answer to that question simply depends on their personal history with a church. Normal to them is whatever culture their particular church knows... For some, normal is an attractional model, where the church attempts to provide a variety of activities for every demographic in the church – so much so – you could be attending something “down at the church” most every night of the week, and all day on Saturday and Sunday... For others, normal may be a culture of tension. Tension between those who are grieving that the church is not today, what they remember from “back in the good-ol days” – and those who grieve that the church is not yet what she needs to be in order to attract the upcoming generation... Well, to answer the question “what is a normal church” from that set of criteria, you can see how the answer would be as diverse as there are people...

But the better question is; “What is a Biblically normal church”? What does the Bible say is a “normal church”?

**Vance Havner** – “The church is so subnormal that if it ever got back to the New Testament normal it would seem to people to be abnormal.”

It has been argued by many that the contemporary church in America looks more like a large corporation than like what is described in the New Testament of what a church should be... Sometimes church leaders bear a closer resemblance to CEOs and corporate executives – than they do to humble, tender shepherds... Sadly, the gospel, the good news – that a sinner can find forgiveness for sins against a holy God by placing their trust in and committing their whole life to Jesus Christ – is often eclipsed by ‘success’-oriented programs and an interest in building a crowd and the bottom line...

No wonder many churches have become nothing more than entertainment centers... Such churches are often use tactics that draw people to their buildings – but they are not even proclaiming God’s Word to them, once they come... That is NOT what the Lord intends for His church! In –

Matt. 16:18b (NASB) “... I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Notice the great promise that the Lord makes: “I will build My church”. Christ Himself guarantees the building of the church – when, and only when – He is the One Who is building His church, His way!... When we learn to follow His blueprint – we can be assured that He is doing the work through us and that nothing – not even the gates of hell, can stop Him.

So, what does such a church look like?... A logical place to start is at the beginning with the first church – the church in Jerusalem... We get insight into how He went about building His church when we take a look at what happened on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled 120 believers who had gathered for a prayer meeting... The Lord added 3,000 souls later

that same day (Acts 2:41).

Those new believers didn't know anything about building a church. They had no precedent – no previous example to try and follow. They didn't have a book on the church... They didn't even have the New Testament yet – and yet – the church was built by Jesus, and by His way! We see in the description verses of what the Lord did in and through those early believers – an example of how He goes about the business of building His church throughout history! We now have their story preserved in the pages of the New Testament and they serve as an example to us for what a “**Biblically normal church**” looks like.

#### 1. A Biblically Normal Church is a Persuaded Church

First and foremost, we are –

Convinced of the Truth and Person of Christ

John 14:6 (NASB) “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”

[Col. 1:18](#) (NASB) “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

A Biblically normal church, is a church that is made up of people who are truly regenerated! They are a saved congregation!

One of my favorite theologians –

**Aiden Wilson Tozer** – said it best – “One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organizations do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always.” (As quoted by Michael Clarke in [Life Into Christ](#), ch. 15, [awildernessvoice.com/LifeIntoChrist-Chapt15.html](#))

Acts 2:41-41 identifies the church as being made up of “those who had received [Peter’s] word,” and they became committed to devoting themselves to that word!

The early church was filled with true Christians – those who continually adhered to apostles’ teaching...

Convicted of, and by the Scriptures

The early church was committed to receiving God’s Word –

Acts 2:42 (NASB) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”

Why would they “continually” devote themselves to the Word? It is because doctrine is foundational to the church... You can’t live out what you don’t know or understand. So it is vital that we saturate ourselves with the Word of God!

**Psalm 19:7-11 (NASB)**

<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.

2 Tim. 3:16-17 (NASB)

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired (Lit. *God-breathed*) by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in (Lit. *training which is in*) righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

**John MacArthur** – “Apart from the Holy Spirit, the Bible will utterly fail to penetrate and transform the human heart. With the Spirit of God comes illumination - true understanding of what has been written. Every believer has the Holy Spirit, the One who inspired the writers of Scripture, and without His illuminating ministry to us, the truth of Scripture could not penetrate our hearts and minds.” (*Charismatic Chaos*, John MacArthur, Jr., 1992, p. 115)

**Albert Barnes** (1798-1870, American theologian) – “It does not require great learning to be a Christian and be convinced of the truth of the Bible. It requires only an honest heart and a willingness to obey God.” (As quoted by Tryon Edwards in *A Dictionary of Thoughts*, 1908, p. 70)

A normal Biblical church is persuaded of the truth, authority, reliability, sufficiency, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture!... We could, and perhaps should, and one day will – have a whole series why we teach that the Bible IS the very Word of God!... I want us to be a Biblically normal church – and to be so – we MUST be persuaded of the veracity of the Word of God!...

The early church was! Again –

Acts 2:42 (NASB) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”

The Scriptures tell us how to organize and what to do! And so we are committed to the Biblical model of the plurality of elders, the service of the deaconate, the regulative principle in worship, and the complementarian view of rolls, and the accountability of the membership – just to name a few of the characteristics of a “Biblically normal church”!

2. A Biblically Normal Church is an Empowered Church  
Specifically – a Holy Spirit empowered church!

There are many ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Biblically normal church, but for time’s sake we will limit ourselves to just two today:

The Holy Spirit –

Empowers us to follow the truth

John 16:13a (NASB) “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...”

Hear me carefully at this point: All truth is God’s truth! Truth – that which is

really true – is something the Holy Spirit teaches – whether it is truth God has revealed in His Word, or truth that God has revealed in the universe... All truth is God’s truth and we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us in that truth.

The Holy Spirit –

Empowers us to overcome the flesh

Listen – an unsaved membership is devoid of the Holy Spirit!... As a result, there is no capacity to overcome self-will, personal agendas, and the love of sin!

Rom. 8:9 (NASB) “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

Only believers are given divine power to turn from the flesh – and to seek to walk in the power of the Spirit of God!

3. A Biblically Normal Church is a Declaring Church

By that I mean – a healthy, Biblically normal church has something to SAY!... We have been given exactly what needs to be heard and are charge with the responsibility of taking that message to everyone!

Matt. 28:18-20 (NASB)

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

There is more about this passage we will say later, but for now, we are simply focusing on the fact that our Lord has given us a message to take to the world!... It is stated even more succinctly in –

Mark 16:15 (NASB) “And He [Jesus] said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’”

Preaching the gospel faithfully from the pulpit

Every pastor knows – or should know – the priority of our ministry is to faithfully preach the Word!

**2 Tim. 4:1-5 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

<sup>2</sup> preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own

desires,<sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.<sup>5</sup> But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Proclaiming the gospel faithfully from the people

It is not only the privilege and responsibility of pastor to proclaim God's Word – but it is every Christian's responsibility to be equipped, available and ready to engage in gospel conversations with the prayer that the Lord would use us in the proclaiming of this life-changing truth!

Rom. 10:13-15 (NASB)

<sup>13</sup> for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”

**Jim Cymbala** – a modern American theologian, with whom I don't always agree – but he is spot on, when he said – “The Bible does not say we should aim at numbers but rather urges us faithfully to proclaim God's message in the boldness of the Holy Spirit. This will build God's church God's way.” (Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, Jim Cymbala, 2003)

#### 4. A Biblically Normal Church is a Praying Church

Personal private prayer-life

Matt. 6:6 (NASB) “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

1 Thess. 5:17 (NASB) “pray without ceasing”

Another of my favorite authors –

**Andrew Murray** – “Let us thank God heartily as often as we pray that we have His Spirit in us to teach us to pray. Thanksgiving will draw our hearts out to God and keep us engaged with Him; it will take our attention from ourselves and give the Spirit room in our hearts.” (The Prayer Life, 2012, Andrew Murray ch. 6, p. 2)

Personal corporate prayer-life

There are many places throughout God's Word that speaks to our need to pray together!... One of which is found in Ephesians, just after Paul wrote about the Armor of God, he admonished that we should all –

Eph. 6:18 (NASB) “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Again, the early church was devoted to praying together!

Acts 2:42 (NASB) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

Listen – these major points about being a Biblically normal church are all interdependent. In other words they all work together to help us see, know and desire to be a truly healthy church! For example – our prayer life – together or alone – is absolutely dependent on the enabling of the Holy Spirit Himself –

Rom. 8:26 (NASB) “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”

The early believers continually devoted themselves to prayer... Sadly, the same devotion to prayer is missing today... Many churches can pack pews by

offering entertainment, but when a prayer meeting is held, only a faithful few even show up... The early Christians remembered the Lord's promise –

**John 14:13-14 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*.

As the early church demonstrated dependence on the Lord – the Lord brought about the following results

**Acts 2:43-47 (NASB)**

<sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

#### 5. A Biblically Normal Church is a Covenantal Church

We are committed to our Lord and to one another in a covenant relationship that is both formal and personal.

Personally committed members

After a lot of work, the Elders on the Powell campus have approved the following updated Mission Statement for FBCP – which, for now, includes our church:

*We are a Gospel-Centered community who loves God and others by:*

- *Worshipping Him.*
- *Proclaiming His Word.*
- *Sharing His Gospel.*
- *Equipping His People.*

Though I was very much a part of that process, I don't think we will keep this unique phrasing for Norwood Baptist Church... As we make prepare to become autonomous, we too need to revisit this mission statement and determine how to best express our focus on the commission the Lord has given to His Church in this place...

Personally caring members

Caring for others!... The early church had "all things common" (Acts 2:44-45) – which is NOT some kind of Biblical justification for Communism – but simply a statement that the church truly cared for

each other... It was a caring that meant more than words – but called for action!

When someone had a genuine need that they could not meet themselves – God would often meet that need through the sacrificial gifts and service of others... The early believers learned to “share life” together and cared for each other – and God was glorified!

## 6. A Biblically Normal Church will be an Oppressed Church

### Opposition from within

That is – we are constantly aware of the conflict we each personally have with our own flesh!... We have to agree with Paul when he said –

Rom. 7:18 (NASB) “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.”

The battle against our own flesh is not limited to us as individuals alone. In other words, when we living according to the flesh, rather than according to the Spirit – our shortcomings will affect others around us. How oppressive an environment is the church that is being destroyed from within due to the infighting by people who are not battling their own flesh, but seek to only battle others.

Eph. 6:12 (NASB) “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

### Opposition from without

The early church experienced a great deal of opposition – and even persecution:

Acts 7:59-8:1 (NASB)

<sup>59</sup> They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” <sup>60</sup> Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

<sup>8:1</sup> Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Don’t be surprised when we may well experience similar oppression. We are not immune!

**Kevin Turner** – and others, have been created with the quote – “Calamity clarifies and comfort confuses; persecution purifies and prosperity pollutes!”

Jesus said –

John 16:33 (NASB) “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

## 7. A Biblically Normal Church is a Reproducing Church

### Committed to the Great Commission

Matt. 28:18-20 (NASB)

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Rev. 7:9 (NASB) “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands”

Committed to Revitalization

A few years ago, **Bobby Jamieson** (Associate Pastor, Capital Hill Baptist Church and contributor to IX Marks – wrote an article on Church revitalization. In it he said that – “Church revitalization – bringing life to dying churches by dealing with the causes of decline and building toward faithfulness – is a biblical burden. That is, when we see these churches acting as anti-witnesses to Christ, we should, according to Scripture, have a burden to *do something* about it.”

The Apostle Paul was used by the Lord to plant the church in Corinth sometime around AD 50... He wrote 1 Corinthians a few years later in response to reports he had received about the church – as well as some questions the church had sent to him... What were the issues that prompted Paul to write?

Consider the following:

- Divisions and factions: some saying “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos” (1:10-17);
- Tolerating sexual immorality (5:1-13);
- Lawsuits among church members (6:1-8);
- Confusion over marriage and sexuality (7:1-40);
- Division in the church over the limits of Christian freedom (8:1-13; 10:1-33);
- Worship wars (11-14);
- And false teaching about the resurrection (15).

It doesn't take much thinking to draw the conclusion that that the church in Corinth around AD 55 is the spitting image of many evangelical churches today... Many churches are crumbling from within because of the spiritual virus of false teaching, division, immorality, and just being what the old-timers used to call “backslidden”.

So when Paul was faced with these issues in Corinth, what did he do?... Well, he didn't just say; “*Those people are hopeless. They're a mixture of false believers and proud, stubborn religious people. You don't want those people in your church anyway*” – and then commission Timothy to go and plant a new church in Corinth... No, instead, Paul pleaded with them. He came to see them again and again. He rebuked them, instructed them, constantly prayed for them and stayed with it until God did something!... Paul worked to reform the church of God which was at Corinth.

There are many differences between Paul's situation and ours: One example is that the church in Corinth was the *only* church in that city at the time. And the point is – instead of abandoning the church at Corinth to simply rot away in its sin, Paul was committed to repair and restore it... A similar kind of repair and restoration is exactly what countless Southern Baptist churches need today.

**Bobby Jamison** – “Churches aren't compostable. And when they begin to decay, they can give off a stench for years or decades or even centuries that utterly overwhelms the aroma of Christ.

When a church is divided, it proclaims that Christ is divided (1 Cor. 1:13). When a church tolerates immorality, it says to the world that Christ isn't holy – and that the sexually immoral and idolaters and drunkards and swindlers *will* inherit the kingdom of God (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

If there is any place in the Bible that we can point to – to see that church revitalization is indeed what Biblically normal churches do – it is what Jesus said to the church at Sardis –

Rev. 3:2 (ESV) “Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.”

“Strengthen what remains and is about to die”...

Whenever our church truly becomes “revitalized” – I pray that it remains in our DNA to be a church that seeks to revitalize sister churches that are in such need as well...

**Bobby Jamison** – “A decaying, sin-riddled church is like a lighthouse with a broken bulb – and mirror. Instead of reflecting the light of God's glory for miles around, to call sinners into the safe haven of God's mercy, such a church leaves the night as dark as it was before – or even darker.

It's like a radio transmitting station that's been hijacked: regardless of what they claim to believe, such a church broadcasts lies about God rather than the truth.”

Church revitalization – for ourselves and others – should be a major focus in what we think about and strategize over and pray for...

Church revitalization should be our burden because it is God's burden – and His command to Sardis is



also a command to Norwood – strive to “strengthen what remains and is about to die”.

I want to see our church grow, and I know you share that desire... My prayer is that we will let God build the church His way as we await our Lord’s return...

There are many more observations we can make from Scripture, about what a healthy, normal church looks, and functions like... But I read somewhere that “7” is the perfect number – and so seven points should be enough for today...

Questions to consider in Community Group:

(Remember, the desire of these questions is not merely to “restate” the message, but to get to appropriate application of God’s Word to our lives. If you think of a questions that will better help meet that goal, please ask them.)

There were seven observations made about what a Biblically normal church looks like. Which one stands out to you the most, and why?

Vance Havner was quoted as saying – “The church is so subnormal that if it ever got back to the New Testament normal it would seem to people to be abnormal.” If there is truth in that statement, how do you see the church being *subnormal* today?

Of all the Scripture passages cited in the message, which ones “leaped off the page” for you, and why?

Was there a quote shared in the message that especially spoke to you? If so, which one?

This message was more topical, or thematic than what we normally hear on Sundays. Why would this style of sermon NOT be the best for a “steady diet” from the pulpit? (No one answer is being sought... Simply looking for a healthy conversation on the value of expository preaching.)

What do you think is the most important application we should draw from this message?