

10 Essential Principles: An Evaluation on January 1, 2023

Today, we come to another year. It is January 1, 2023. And as all years for us come and go, all of us remember the good; and we also remember the bad. And for some of us, this year has been especially bad. There has been more sickness, more death, more anxiety, more depression, more persecutions, etc. And according to our disposition, our personality, the ways in which God has formed our hearts and our minds, each of us cope and endure and experience this short life of troubles in different ways. Our world is filled with sin and the effects of sin are evident. But, God is sovereign over his creation, and He is providentially working all things exactly according to his plan. And since the fall of Adam, God, in his mercy, and according to his love, God's promise stands. It is the promise of the Gospel first found in Gen. 3:15 as he promised to crush the head of Satan. And found in this promise was not only to destroy the works of the devil, but also to provide salvation from sin and death. And not merely to provide salvation from sin and death in this world for his people, but also to completely destroy sin and death, and wipe away all tears, and to create a new heaven and a new earth. And this great plan is demonstrated and established in the person and work of Jesus, the Son of God, particularly his death on the cross and his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. And this we remember today as we take the Lord's Supper. Jesus said, "**This is my body, broken for you.**" As we take the Lord's Supper today, we remember that ALL God's promises are "yes" in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

Today, as Christians, we know that God is working all things according to our good. No matter what came your way this year, and no matter what comes your way in 2023, God's promise in Christ will carry you through. As Christians, by faith, we hold onto Christ. As Christians, we know that Jesus paid our sin debt. He laid down his life as a sacrifice . . . in our place. As one born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, He took on flesh and lived a sinless life. And when he cried out on the cross, "*It is finished,*" and gave up his Spirit, He took our sins upon himself. And God punished HIM! God's wrath fell upon HIM! The punishment that our sins deserved fell upon HIM! And God's wrath was averted! And if you are a Christian today, if by faith you look unto Christ, your sins are forgiven! The wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness (Rom. 1:18), which still resides today upon those who oppose God and his Son, no longer exist for those who have faith in the Son. And this we remember!

Also, found in the command to take the Lord's Supper is the command to examine ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28). It is an opportunity for us to consider our sins and know that Christ has covered them. And then, in a heart of repentance we not only confess them, we also have a great desire NOT to continue doing them. As Christians we confess our sins, knowing that Jesus died for them, and by God's grace, with a repentant heart, we do all we can as we go to the Word, as we meditate and memorize, as we pray for God's help, we speak with other Christians, and by God's grace, over time, we grow in godliness. We could apply this truth to any sin! AND there is something about regular observance of the Lord's Supper that help us in this way. And for this I/We are so grateful!

With this in mind, I would like to do something I've never done before. I would like to examine ourselves in a larger way. This year makes 15 years we have been together as a local body at

Grace. And I remember the transition as some of us split from another church, as our family was living overseas. If I remember right, Kristen and I agreed to return home and take on this role as pastor in December of 2007. But we didn't actually get back and start until the end of April, 2008. From January to April small groups met in homes weekly and meeting once as a whole together. And I remember those difficult months from January to April as we packed and prepared to return to NC. And as many of you know, I had never been a pastor, at least in this capacity. I had certainly never preached on a weekly basis. I had no experience in this kind of setting. However, we believed it to be the will of God for us to come. And I sat down over those few weeks (in Russia) and put down some principles that I felt were important for a church. They are certainly not exhaustive. But, looking back on them, I think they are biblical and good for us. And though I have not shared them openly with everyone, these core "values" (principles) still have not changed in my thinking in my role as pastor. I shared them recently with Greg. He said I should share them with the church. So today, I am listening to Greg. And as I share them, I would like to use the time as an opportunity to examine ourselves and ask ourselves "*How are we doing?*" With this in mind, my sermon today will not be according to manuscript. I would like to simply speak to these principles by way of examination before we take the Lord's Supper.

10 Essential values with the goal of glorifying God in everything we do.

1. Create an environment where worship is primary (not just on Sunday morning).
2. Create an environment where prayer is our heartbeat.
3. Create an environment where the gospel displays the glory of God.
4. Create an environment where the functions of the church are biblical, not worldly (we must govern ourselves biblically).
5. Create an environment where disciple making is normal.
6. Create an environment where family unity is fostered.
7. Create an environment where accountability is normal.
8. Create an environment where evaluation is normal.
9. Create an environment where we are being transformed by the renewing of our mind (read the Bible, but also read good books to help us grow).
10. Create an environment where loving one another is normal.