

“Centered” Lovers of the Whole Church

Series: What God Has Begun: Recapturing Our Core Values

Brad Bailey – November 1, 2015

Intro

When I first heard of how God loved me...and in Christ had come and died to bear my sin and separation... my soul found life...and found not only the beginning of a love for God...but for all who gathered around this great divine love. But as I soon reached my young adult years...like most young adults...I began to develop more opinions about the way God's people should be... I became more critical. But around that time, I met and worked with a man who loved the church. Actually what I found was that he loved Christ so much...that he loved the church. It **wasn't a love for an institution...but a love for all those who were gathering to know Jesus.**

That man was **Linus Morris. He has never stopped having that same influence. Centered in who Jesus is...and what Jesus has done...that you can't help but enjoying what he is doing in those around you...wherever they are at... however offensive in belief or behavior.**

Soon...I was introduced to **John Wimber the founder of the Vineyard movement of churches...** and that same love for Christ flowed into a love for the church...the **WHOLE** church.

When John passed on to heaven...at his memorial service there were thousands who came...from all over the world...but the final person to speak was his wife Carol. What would she say as the closest to him? I never forgot ...she said what most may never fully see...was his love for the whole church. She said John could visit a small traditional church with just a few people...and he would be as happy to be there as a mega-church of thousands...because they loved Jesus.

Marty Boller, in his recent book about John's life wrote:

“One of the key driving components inside Wimber and the work he did for God's kingdom was his amazing ability to love and appreciate the larger body of Christ. Over the years, I believe many have forgotten how careful he was to never speak negatively toward other Christians, even when some of those same brothers and sisters were spouting off publicly with all kinds of negative comments concerning John and the work he was doing for Jesus.” [1]

Today... as we continue...our series entitled “What God Began – recapturing our core values”...we are engaging how we were **birthed with a love for the whole church.**

That **may sound like a nice** thing to value...**but not particularly** significant or **relevant to you.** Some may just think that loving their own local church is all that matters. Some may wonder if they love any of the church....because they have been wounded.

Wherever we may be in developing a love for the whole church... I think we all want what is at the **heart of this call: which is to become centered people...**so centered in what is at the heart of God's people that we can find a freedom to love all who gather around that center.

I believe that if we look beneath the heart and soul of these men...what lies there is a life that flows from a central love... that casts a proper heart for everything else.

Those who are centered most in the person of Christ, are most able to love all who gather around Christ.

But this may require a change... a change in how we see others. Let's listen in on a moment in which Jesus' first followers learned this truth. [2, 3]

Luke 9:49-50 (NIV)

"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

Not one of their best moments with Jesus. Someone was engaging the evil spirits that were oppressing people... based on the name...authority of Jesus.

What kind of man was this that John refers to? There's no suggestion that he is a fraud looking for some selfish source of power. He's likely a true believer in Jesus. He may have been someone who, having listened to the Master and having given his heart to him, had not as yet established close relationships with the Master's other followers. All that we know for certain is that he had been casting out demons in Christ's name, and that John and others—perhaps other apostles—had tried to stop him.

Apparently the attempt to stop the man had not succeeded. He **must have been fully convinced** of the fact that **what he was doing was right and proper**. He had been doing it **"in Christ's name,"** that is, as explained previously, **in full accordance, as he saw it, with the mind and words of Jesus**. With this man the phrase in Christ's name was **not a magical formula**; it was reality.

So what was the problem?

"...because he is not one of us."

Good things are happening in the name of Jesus but he wasn't part of the group. (The twelve and perhaps not even to the broader circle of constant followers (Luke 6:13; 10:1).

Sounds a little exclusive.

Who raises the issue? John...the one closest to Jesus.

Likely John had taken a **leading part** in the attempt to stop this man from doing what he was doing.

Simple jealousy? Perhaps. Imagine... these ordinary men had been called to join the one who came from heaven... they were part of the inside circle...the inner ring...the chosen few...but

now someone else thinks THEY can take up this ministry. We can imagine how we might react... With some vain jealousy. As N.T Wright says, "Whenever any project is launched, **people discover that their own ambitions get mixed up** with it. That has to be dealt with before you can start." (N.T. Wright) Their sense of being special was threatened.

But there's more than mere jealousy.

John clearly loved Jesus...but what we see is how devotion can become misguided. One can think they need to protect the boundaries... and lose sight of the purpose...of the center.

You get this sense that they were telling Jesus what they had done because they thought he SHOULD know...that he would be glad...that he might be proud of their protective devotion. You can sense they were saying: "We were just trying to protect the rightness of everything associated with Jesus "

After all...Jesus did had a lot to say about what we should believe and how we should live... and the significance of such truth. So it may have seemed fitting that they become protectors of truth and the "right" way.

So what's wrong?

Jesus said to him, Do not stop him, for he who is not against you is for you. When someone really engages Jesus...there is no neutrality...one's response is what matters...either against or for him. [3]

In these words Jesus is engaging what we might call a paradigm...a way of seeing things. The religious leaders always sought to protect the truth...in a way that ended up defining who belonged according to external matters more than the heart of the matter. That is what Jesus confronted. What's interesting is that he had chosen followers who were not on the inside of that religious system. They were those who were never on the inside...and yet now they seem to be drawn into the same tendency... to protect the boundaries... and lose sight of the purpose...of the center.

What changed them... getting called to the person and purposes of Jesus.

Now they were **stuck in the old paradigm...** one that presumed they were the owners and **protectors of truth more than those who were centered in a humble love for the person and purpose of such truth.**

> They lost what was central... the person and purpose of Jesus.

At the heart of the matter...they weren't centered. They were more focused on the boundaries than the center.

Jesus' words call for a paradigm shift.

From Bounded Set to Centered Set

John Wimber shared a how there are two paradigms by which any group can define itself. Drawing from the work that had been applied to the church by Paul Hiebert, John described the difference between a bounded set and a centered set. [4]

Bounded Sets

- ... are formed by defining the boundaries – the essential qualities which separate something inside the set from something outside. Heibert's classic example is "apples." Either a fruit is an apple, or it isn't.
- Maintaining the boundary is crucial to maintaining the category.
- Bounded sets are static sets – they don't change, they only add or lose members.
- The important thing is to "cross the boundary" to be part of the set.

One of the problems with bounded set thinking is that it defines the set based primarily by external elements...a breadth of beliefs and how one behaves. But Jesus said what defines us is how we respond to his call to **follow him**. It is ore about **our posture towards him**... more a matter of **the direction we are facing**. [5]

Bounded set is like a **horse coral**...the emphasis is to keep those who belong inside a boundary. That's what **defines that they belong**.

Centered Sets

- ... are formed by defining a center. The set is made up of all objects moving toward that center. As an everyday example: "bald men."
- While a centered set does not focus on the boundary, a boundary does indeed exist. The boundary is clear so long as the center is clear.
- The objects within a centered set are not categorically uniform. Some may be near the center and others far from it, even though all are moving towards the center.

Centered sets are **dynamic, in motion**. A baby might be born with no hair, but hair is coming, so that baby may start near the center but moves away and eventually is out of the category. On the other hand, a 20-year-old might have hair, but it's already starting to stay on the comb, so he's on his way into the category.

A good picture of a centered set could be a **watering hole**.

In many cases, there will be only one watering hole for miles and miles in any direction. This means that animals that live in the area will never stray too far from the water, especially in the dry season.

You never know who you may share a watering hole with.

With centered sets, the key question is whether I am oriented and moving toward the center or moving away from the center. I'm defined on where I am, and where I'm moving, in relation to the center.

Jesus engaged this problem in many parables...including the prodigal son...which ends with the older son... representing the religious leaders and our religious pride... resentful...claiming it's

not fair that the younger son is welcomed back...and celebrated... after all...he the older son had been working all these years. There we hear the cry to be secure in our merits...rather than in mercy. And we hear the Father say ... "I have always been with you...now come in to the party."
Tragically... he judged the brother...held onto his merits...and never joined the party of mercy. The story is one of direction to the center.... More than the behaviors of merit.

It is hard to learn. But the good news is that the disciples did learn...and so can we.
Let me offer....

Some ways to become more centered... and develop a love for the whole church...

1. Recognize what is central and non-central

John Wimber would remind us of the position that states, [6]

"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

It's not original with us. Though the origin is debated, it is most commonly attributed to Augustine.

The idea is simple: there are elements of truth and convictions that are central... and what is central is essential...without it... there is no essence. So it's the hill we die on... whatever the cost.

But here are many elements that are important but not essential

There are **some things** that those committed to what is essential have had **different views** on ever **since Jesus launched** his calling over 2,000 years ago.

For example, consider the **various views surrounding the unfolding of the end times**. We have people with different views about the events that will unfold when Christ returns. We have folks who are pre-millennial, amillennial, post-millennial, and those who don't know how many "L's" are even in the *word* millennial!

You can also put some lifestyle issues in with this. For example, the Bible states that giving ourselves over to the state of intense drunkenness is never plan "A," but how we live our lives in order to *honor* that command differs widely. Some believe that it is best to abstain completely; others feel free to have wine with every meal and a cold beer watching their favorite team.

In the Book of Romans (Romans 14), Paul speaks of how we have **different associations** and **must be faithful to honor God and give others freedom to honor God by what one** may feel something represents... meat if sacrificed to idols... the significance of special holidays.. holy days.

Last night... Halloween. It rightfully is something each person must discern in terms of what it represents to themselves.

So in the essentials, we have unity. In the non-essentials, we have liberty. But in all things we have charity – which is just another word for love. As we put it, we have made the decision to **“agree to disagree, agreeably.”**

1 Corinthians 8:1-3 (NLT)

Now regarding your question about [...fill in the blank]... Yes, we know that “we all have knowledge” about this issue. But while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.

He is not declaring that knowledge about what is true and right doesn’t matter... but only that knowledge without love for God is just pride.

Let’s recognize what is central and non-central

2. Look beyond disappointment to the potential

Some here may have been hurt by some form of the church...or even some other authority or group that leaves afraid... of groups. The problem is not that of judging... but of what we can see when we judge.

Do we see some categorical good vs. bad...or good that may have lost it’s way.

Ex. – If a woman is hurt by a man...she could decide that all men are bad...but if she allows herself...she may meet a man who blesses her...and she discovers more truly not only the truth about men...but she discovers more fully who she is as a woman.
(In the same way...I see many retreat from church community but it often feels like a safe road away from life.)

"To love a person" said Dostoevsky, "means to see him as God intended him to be."

Philip Yancey

Jesus sees us as those whom his Father loves and grieves over because we were going wrong. He sees us as God originally designed and meant us to be... bound and mastered by what was not meant to be.

That may be what we need to see as we look at those who may disappoint us.

Look beyond disappointment to the potential.

3. Discover Jesus amidst different streams and styles of communities that gather with him.

Both men that I referred to as bearing a love for the whole church... are **men who have discovered** that ...

Jesus has blessed them wherever and however people are gathered around him.

John Wimber...was first invited to know Jesus by a Quaker Bible Study...whose style and stream was quite different from his background...and from what he would later develop in terms of the Vineyard churches. But they loved him... taught him.

Then in his years traveling and consulting...blessed by those quite different...yet lived with a defined personal call...that is reflected in the Vineyard movement.

You can appreciate the whole church best when you discover that your particular positions... preference and priorities as significant as they are...allow enjoying the common ground of Christ.

The recent week in which the **Pope visited the US**...I have no Catholic background...but as I watched... I smiled with a love for the Church.

One way I have found important to me...is to join with pastors from every background... something I help facilitate every month. (**Westside Pastor's Fellowship**)

We share and pray together...for ourselves...and for you...and for the purpose we share. I get so blessed... praying with those I can feel so different with...as it is so obvious that Jesus is with us. I need it.

During World War II some soldiers had a buddy who died. They went to a local Roman Catholic parish and asked the priest if they could bury their friend in the fenced graveyard beside the church.

The old priest asked, "Was the man Roman Catholic?"

"We haven't any idea," they said.

The priest replied, "Well, you'll have to bury him just outside the graveyard fence then."

So they buried the body outside the fence and left. They happened to pass through the same town later, however, and visited their friend's grave. They looked at the fence in amazement. It wasn't where it had been before. The old priest, realizing that his way of thinking was ungodly, had moved the fence to include the fallen soldier's grave. [7]

Some of us may have some fences to move. As we see Jesus in the larger world ... and experience... we can **begin to move our fences**.

Communion....

We are going to conclude exactly as Christ led his church... on his last night of bodily presence.

When Jesus shared in the Last Supper...he was taking up what was the regular Passover meal...that which was always a shared re-enactment of God's provision from judgment and liberation from slavery. He didn't teach them how to eat the bread and drink of the cup at home...he clearly was **revealing** that **he was now the eternal lamb** who **provided freedom from judgment and freedom from slavery**. On that night as he made it clear that this was a **shared reality...a communal reality** in which **he shared the bread and passed the cup**. In the bread and wine... representing his body and blood...we becomes one...reconciled to God and one another. It defined them as a community.

As we prepare to receive these elements, let understand that we **cannot receive his body** reflected in these elements **if we do not receive his body which is now the church.** [9]

And that acceptance goes much broader. For today is what has been know in many circles as All Saints Day.

You may know that Halloween...what was celebrated last night...comes from the term Hallow's Eve... the eve or night before the All Hallowed Day or All Saints Day as it is now referred to. As with most Christian feast days, there's some argument over the timing and traditions around All Hallow's Eve ...but it **leads into All Saints day**... a holy day shared by some traditions (Catholics and Anglicans) to commemorate heroes of the faith... as a time to remember that all who claim the faith — past, present, and future — are part of the same body. By claiming the faith, we're claiming a kinship with heroes who have gone before, and saying we're in this together, too. [8] So today as we receive the body of Christ in these elements...let us receive our place in the body of Christ that has been a part of past, present, and future....across countless cultures.

Notes:

1. Boller, Marty (2014-12-01). *The Wisdom of Wimber: As I See It* (Kindle Locations 2386-2389). Harmon Press. Kindle Edition.

2. The parallel passage in Marks Gospel...

Mark 9:38-41 (NLT)

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he wasn't in our group." ³⁹ "Don't stop him!" Jesus said. "No one who performs a miracle in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Anyone who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ If anyone gives you even a cup of water because you belong to the Messiah, I tell you the truth, that person will surely be rewarded.

3 On this passage in Luke 9...

N.T. Wright notes more fully,

"Whenever any project is launched, people discover that their own ambitions get mixed up with it. That has to be dealt with before you can start; the problem will recur, but markers must be put down right away. Then the disciples have to learn that God's kingdom may be going forward through people they don't know, who aren't part of their group. Things are not always straightforward." [From Wright, T. (2004). *Luke for Everyone* (pp. 117–118). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.]

Regarding the nature of this man casting out demons,

"What kind of man was John talking about? Not a would-be exorcist, like the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13–16), for these were frauds. Nor was he an exorcist in the sense of those condemned in Matt. 7:22. No, this man was in all probability a true believer in Jesus. He may have been someone who, having listened to the Master and having given his heart to him, had not as yet established close relationships with the Master's other followers. All that we know for certain is that he had been casting out demons in Christ's name, and that John and others—

perhaps other apostles—had strongly disapproved of his actions: and we tried to stop him because he is not following along with us.

Apparently the attempt to stop the man had not succeeded. He must have been fully convinced of the fact that what he was doing was right and proper. He had been doing it “in Christ’s name,” that is, as explained previously, in full accordance, as he saw it, with the mind and words of Jesus. With this man the phrase in Christ’s name was not a magical formula; it was reality. The reason given by John for the attempt to stop him was “because he is not following along with us.” It is entirely possible that John had taken a leading part in the attempt to stop this man from doing what he was doing. If this seems strange, could the reason have been that it took some time before this “son of thunder” (Mark 3:17; cf. Luke 9:54) was changed into “the disciple whom Jesus loved”? See John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20. But is it not more likely that it was exactly love for his Master—misguided love—that caused John and others to try to stop that exorcist, who had not joined Christ and his steady followers?” [From Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, p. 521). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.]

It has been noted that the interchange in this text (Luke 9:49-51) comes amidst what can seem scattered exchange between Jesus and his disciples...but notably many of which are his challenge to them about similar ways in which they related to others... superiority... judgment. One commentary note:

“Again, the disciples are caught up in the excitement of fighting a theological battle (vv. 49–50). They were the guardians of the truth and they wanted to stamp out the unorthodox. Yet God can be working in the world through all sorts of people, even some who seem to us antireligious. But it’s much more stimulating and exciting to engage in theological skirmishes than to affirm and support the good that we see. Later, James and John urge a course of action that is dramatic and exciting. They want to destroy the town that has refused to receive Jesus, but Jesus rebukes them. The calling down of fire and brimstone still has appeal. Those churches who take a strong stand against all the evils of life are prospering. They are against sin, the devil, alcoholism, pornography, communism (you can make your own list). People will flock to join the “against” churches—those with a negative thrust. It’s much more difficult to attract a following for a positive program, one for God and for our neighbors. That’s too ordinary and unexciting.” [From Larson, B., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1983). *Luke* (Vol. 26, pp. 181–182). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.]

4. Bounded and centered ideas have emerged from different disciplines and given their application to the church by Paul Hiebert. Some descriptions can be found at:
Bob Thune - Centered-Set vs. Bounded-Set Churches;
<http://www.bobthune.com/2015/06/centered-set-vs-bounded-set-churches/>

5. John Ortberg also notes: “Another problem with a bounded-set approach not that it highlights the difference between Christians and non-Christians; it's that it highlights the wrong differences, and encourages us to exaggerate and claim differences that don't exist. For instance, Jesus had a lot to say about concern for the poor. But if we think that non-

Christians are also concerned for the poor, we won't focus on it much because it doesn't highlight "how we are different." [Category Confusion; Is the question for Christians "Out or In?" or "Farther or Closer?"; John Ortberg; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2010/june-online-only/categoryconfusion.html>]

6. James Emery White - Church and Culture blog, [Unity, Liberty and Charity](#)

7. The experience of moving fences came from Ted Haggard, "Primary Purpose.

8. Drawn from a good reflection on All Saints Day by [Catherine Woodiwiss](#) "A Better Hallows Eve", Sojourners, 10-29-2015

9. It could also be added as we take communion, that there is reason for it requiring grace towards others. We may need to offer him our fears of others... or our disappointments... and bring them to the common table of grace. Remember...he shared this meal as a sign that was going to give himself...and he did so 'on the night he was betrayed.' There on one side of him...Judas...and another...Peter who would deny him. Why did he not check out of the group? Because they were safe? No. Because they were a special group? No. It was because they were us. They were those who were bound in grace...those God loved.