Video - Church interview with Satan and Craig Groeschel - https://youtu.be/ZDqRheBu2cg

So, if we were to interview Satan about Agape Christian Church, do you think he would be pleased? Do you think he would like our church because it’s easy for him to distract us and get us off mission? Or is Agape one of those churches that he can’t stand because we’re actually making a difference for the Kingdom of God?

We’ve been talking about the core values of Agape Christian Church for quite a while now, and today we’re going to talk about what we are supposed to be as a church. What is the church supposed to do, what is the church supposed to look like?. Just like everything else that we’ve done in this series, we’re going to take a look at what the truth of Scripture has to say about what the church should be and do. We’re going to take a look at the biblical foundations of the church, what God’s biblical design for the church was from the very beginning.

Because if we aren’t the church that God intends for us to be, we’re just one more club among many, one more social organization with man-made foundations, and man-made goals. Now, don’t get me wrong, social organizations are not a bad thing, but the church was meant to be so much more than that.

The first Scripture I want to look at today is in Matthew 16. In Matthew 16, Jesus had taken his disciples to the district of Caesarea Philippi, which was a very heavily pagan area, complete with idols and statues from all different religions and beliefs. There is still today a mountainside that has these pockets carved out in the stone where all these different idols and statues used to sit and people would come there to worship them. So, Jesus took his disciples there, to this place full of paganism, about as far as you could get from what they believed and what they were all about, and then Jesus asks them a question.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:13–16 ESV

So, Jesus takes his disciples to this pagan place, shows them all these different things that people believed were gods, and then he asks them who they believe him to be. Peter gives the best answer that he possibly could have. He said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”. So, after Peter makes his confession there to Jesus, Jesus says this.

And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Matthew 16:17–20 ESV

That’s a powerful statement, one that contains a lot of hope, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. But what exactly did Jesus mean by what he said to Peter, that this was the rock that he would build his church on?

A lot of people take that to mean that Peter himself would be the foundation of the church, that Peter would be the one that the foundation of the church would rest upon. And Peter was certainly a huge part of the beginnings of the church. He was the one who preached that first sermon on the day of Pentecost, he was one of the first ones to go to the Gentiles, even if it was a little against his own nature. He was one of the apostles who helped spread the Gospel and govern the church as it was first beginning.

Peter was certainly a part of that foundation, he was given a huge role to play in that the beginnings of the church. But there was something more important than Peter that Jesus was pointing to as the foundation of the church, the rock that Jesus would build his church upon. That was the confession that Peter had just made that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus Christ that forms the foundation of the church, it’s against that foundation that the gates of Hell will not prevail.

You may recognize those words from more than just Scripture, because we have taken that and made that confession into our confession of faith. So, whenever someone joins the church, whenever someone chooses to give their life to Christ, this is what they confess before a body of believers, because this is at the very core of what the church is all about.

When Peter calls Jesus the Christ, he is using the term Χριστός. That was the Greek equivalent of the Jewish idea of the Messiah, the deliverer the Israelites had waited so long for. That’s the foundation of the church, the very fact that Jesus is the Christ, he is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Promised Savior, the Deliverer. As the old hymn says, “The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord”. That is what binds us together as Christian brothers and sisters, and that is why the church exists. Without Jesus, there would be no reason for us to gather, or worship, or do anything else that we do as a church.

Walter Scott said that one statement summed up the Gospel Message, that Jesus is the Messiah. Because it communicates that Jesus is the one who delivers, that he is the one who can bring us salvation, and that is the whole point of the Gospel message. If you want one statement about what the church is all about and what we believe, that’s the one: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

So what does that look like when we put it into practice? The whole point of the church is to connect other people with Jesus as the Christ, that is our primary mission. We see that nowhere more clearly than in:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20 ESV

These are some of the last instructions of Jesus to his disciples, and he told them to go and do something very specific. This is the mandate, the mission, for the church worldwide – and it’s the biblical mandate straight from Jesus for Agape Christian Church as well.

This is the goal for every person who becomes a disciple of Jesus, to make more disciples. Rod talked a few weeks ago about what is means to be a disciple of Jesus, how committed we need to be, and how being a disciple of Jesus should be something we are willing to give everything we have to.

The goal of being a disciple is to get as close to your master as possible, to become as much like them as you can, in our case that is Jesus. That was something the disciples of Jesus were already doing here, they were already acting as committed disciples. They had just given up three years of their lives to follow Jesus around and become as much like him as they could, and now Jesus was about to leave them. So Jesus gave them this mission after that, to go out and make more disciples.

The catch here is that if you aren’t already a disciple of Jesus, then you will not be able to meet the Great Commission. Being a disciple of Jesus is a prerequisite to meeting this mission. You don’t get to participate in the mission of the church, and not be a follower of Jesus yourself. You don’t get to stop following after Jesus at some point and still participate in the mission of the church

Gene Mauch once said, “You can’t lead anyone else further than you have gone yourself.” That is true of making disciples of Jesus. You cannot lead people to pursue a relationship with Jesus if you aren’t already pursuing a relationship with him yourself. To produce other disciples of Jesus we have to pursue him ourselves.

So how do we accomplish that mission? Well, Paul talks about this in a couple places, and it’s something that we’ve already looked at in this series of the core values of Agape Christian Church.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4–7 ESV

This is how a church should function as a body, how Christians should work together with all these different gifts that they had for the common good of their church and the common good of the Kingdom of God. This is how the mission of the church gets met, by all of us using our gifts and our abilities in service of Jesus, and to work toward the mission of the church.

When Paul says **1 Corinthians 12:7 ESV — 7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. That word ‘each’ is a Greek word that mean every single one. No one is left out, everyone who puts their faith in Jesus and receives the Holy Spirit also receives spiritual gifts. So, every person who is truly a part of the church of Jesus Christ has some kind of spiritual gift that is meant to be used for building up the church and meeting the mission of the church.

That gift could be teaching, or singing, or encouraging, or praying for others. It could be watching children during Bible studies or worship services. It could be visiting people who are lonely or sick. Or it could be something as simple as making coffee or washing dishes.

Sometimes we think those gifts are unimportant, or it doesn’t really matter if we’re active in the church or not, it doesn’t really matter if we’re using our gifts. But Paul spends the rest of 1 Corinthians 12 making sure that the Corinthians, and every Christian after them, including us, understand that every spiritual gift was important, and every spiritual gift was necessary to the life of the church. Every follower of Christ has a job that God has uniquely suited them to do. And when we choose not to do it, when we choose not to use our gifts at all, then the church suffers for it. When a handful of people decide that they are not going to use their gifts in the church, the church becomes crippled and unable to do what the church was meant to do.

That means that we are part of the church to serve others, not to be served ourselves. Thom Rainer, in his book *I Am A Church* Member, said, “God did not give us local churches to become country clubs where membership means we have privileges and perks. He placed us in churches to serve, to care for others, to pray for leaders, to learn, to teach, to give, and, in some cases, to die for the sake of the Gospel. Church membership is founded on love. Authentic, biblical, unconditional love.”

If you are serving in the church out of obligation, then you are serving for the wrong reason. That love that Thom Rainer spoke of should saturate everything we do, especially the way we serve in the church. The early church did this very well, and they serve as a wonderful example to us today.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42–47 ESV

We see a pretty awesome picture here of what the early church looked like. The key to the way the early church functioned together is that they were devoted to the right things. Acts 2.42 tells us that the early church devoted themselves to four things.

First was the apostles’ teaching. They were devoted to learning about Jesus from those who knew him best, probably hearing a lot of what would eventually become written down as Scripture. Second, they devoted themselves to fellowship with each other. They didn’t just see each other on Sunday mornings. They didn’t say, “Man I’m glad I don’t have to see those people until next week”. No, they were together throughout the week, they had close relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They also devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. Now that could just mean that they ate meals together, but what Luke is probably getting at is that at those meals, they paused to remember the Lord’s supper. They made remembering Jesus’ sacrifice a part of the meals they shared together. And finally, they devoted themselves to prayer. They made prayer an essential part of their everyday life, something they did with each other, something they made a foundational part of their lives.

That word ‘devoted’ in Greek is one that means to persist in something, to hold fast to it, or to do something continually. It means to commit to something, to be dedicated to it. It’s not about just doing those things when we feel like it. It’s about making a decision, making a commitment to do these things no matter what. It’s like when Daniel was committed to prayer even if it meant he would lose his life in the lion’s den, when Paul and Silas, and the rest of the apostles were committed to talking about Jesus no matter what happened to them, or most of all, when Jesus made a commitment to follow after the will of God no matter what kind of suffering he went through.

It takes commitment to follow after Jesus, it takes some real devotion, it’s not something that you can waver back and forth about. My question for you is this: What do you think would happen in this church, in this town, in this country, or in this world, if the followers of Jesus devoted themselves to the same things the early church did? To the teaching of the Bible, to fellowship together, to eating meals and celebrating the Lord’s Supper together, and to prayer.

When those in the early church made those things their priority, incredible things happened in the life of the church. It says that they were in awe, they were amazed at what was going on, and the apostles were doing signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. In fact, **Acts 5:12 (ESV)** says **— 12** many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. This was a regular occurrence, and it was because they were devoted to the right things.

The other thing that we see happen in the early church is this extreme generosity, their willingness to give to others and share what they had for the common good. Living out this kind of generosity doesn’t mean living a communal life. It does mean that we need to put others before ourselves, it means we need to strive to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to do that, it means we need to know the people we worship with.

We need to be close enough to our brothers and sisters in Christ to know when they are in need, to know when they are hurting and need comfort, and to be able to share our needs with them as well. That kind of generosity requires that we open up our wallets, we open up our homes, we open up our ears, and we give up our time to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters who need our help. It means that we give freely from what we have been given by God to take care of the people around us.

Now, just for a moment, I want to take a moment to encourage you all, because Agape Christian Church already does a phenomenal job of this in so many ways. I speak only from my own experience in the past six months here at Agape, and I have already seen an outpouring of this kind of generosity and love for my family and I, people who you are just getting to know. We have had people in this church give up their time to help us with things like fixing our cars, people who have insisted we borrow their car when ours was not working, people who have invited us to dinner and into their homes, people who have offered to be on call to come watch our children, and believe me, I know what kind of sacrifice that is. And not least of all, an incredible outpouring of love and generosity with the baby shower a couple of weeks ago. This is an incredibly generous church, full of people who do not hesitate to give to others out of the blessings that God has given to them. And when you do that, you are showing the love of Jesus to the world around you. That love is what the early church embodied in the way they treated each other. Many of you might recognize 1 Corinthians 13 as what is often called the ‘Love Chapter’.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends…

1 Corinthians 13:1–8 ESV

Those verses are often used at weddings, or to describe the love that a husband or wife has for their spouse. My parents actually had a framed cross stitch of those verses hanging in their house. They would make my sister and I read it out loud when we were fighting with each other. This section of Scripture certainly applies to marriages, or relationships that we have with other people. But in the context of what Paul says there to the Corinthians, this was all about how people should relate to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, how they should treat other people in the church

1 Corinthians 12 is all about our spiritual gifts and how we use them in the body of the church, and then Paul goes back to talking about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14. Paul pauses in the middle of his explanation of how the church should function, not to tell us how marriage should work, but to emphasize the kind of love that should be embodied by the church. This kind of love, agape love, is *the* defining characteristic of what the church should be. Look at what happened when the early church let that kind of love embody who they were.

… the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:47 ESV

By being devoted to the right things, and by loving each other well, the early church was meeting the mission of making disciples of all nations day after day. When that kind of love is what defines who we are and what we do, we will not only have a church that we love and are proud to call our own, but we will also be accomplishing the mission Jesus called us to. We will be the kind of church God always intended for us to be, and we will be a beacon of light in this dark world. Jesus said in:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34–35 ESV

When people see a church that loves like this, that is when we have a chance to show them who Jesus is and show them the kind of love that Jesus has for them.