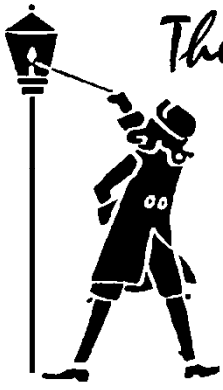

LAKESIDE CHURCH OF CHICAGO

3939 Howard St, Skokie, IL 60076 Fax: 847.763.9719 Phone: 847.763.9720 Email: lakesidechurchofchicago@yahoo.com



LAMPLIGHTER

Rev. Stan Wiedeman, Pastor

Office: 847.763.9725

Rev. Dave Uchizono, Director of C.E.

Office: 847.763.9723

Rev. Mitsuo Suzuki, Pastor, Japanese-Speaking

Office: 847.763.9724

IN CHRIST AND FOR CHRIST - TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN

October 6, 2008

TWO HABITS OF HEALTH

John and Sue (not their real names) joined us in the very early days of our church plant in Joplin. Deb and I had a few more years and a few more children than they did, but we quickly discovered a great affinity for one another. They possessed a genuine zeal to serve Christ, and a willingness to make great sacrifices to do it. Many of the values that Deb and I had adopted were soon transferred to John and Sue's value center. Their family grew at the same rate as ours, and they began teaching their children at home, as we had been doing for several years.

During the course of the next five years things changed very gradually. Deb and I gave more careful theological examination to some of the values that we held, and determined that they comprised a personal call from God, not values that every follower of Jesus should necessarily embrace. John and Sue saw things differently. They believed that these values were embedded in biblical revelation and that God wanted to purify His Church through these values. They thought our church should be teaching these values as an integral part of sanctification.

Dissatisfied with the direction of our church, they joined a small group of families to consider beginning a new church, one more tuned in to God's will and work. Those were very painful days for Deb and I as we watched our friendship ripping apart like human flesh severed by a saw blade. Deb called Sue, but she deferred to her husband. She avoided any direct confrontation over the issue.

I dreaded talking to John. He and I had fought for the kingdom side by side for several years. I had played a major role in encouraging him on his journey of faith. How could I correct him? I was convinced, however, that His path had deviated from sound biblical teaching, in spite of those around him who argued to the contrary. I knew that I must make an effort to confront this dear brother, appealing to him to alter his course.

We met on a warm day on his porch. It was a grim discussion. I could not persuade him to reconsider his position. Before I walked away, I told him that if he remained in this direction, one day he would find himself and his wife alone, separated from all other Christians, isolated by differing standards of purity in the church.

Sadly, my prediction became reality. After several years the families trying to start the church of a higher calling began to splinter apart. Eventually John and Sue were meeting with one other couple, a much older couple notorious for criticizing and leaving churches in the area. (This older couple had attended our church for a few months, but found it lacking in the work of the Spirit.) One Sunday morning the older couple came to John and Sue's house as they had been doing for several months to worship. When Sue appeared in a sleeveless dress, the older man rebuked her for her inappropriate dress. John and Sue disagreed with his position, so the older couple left. John and Sue were left alone.

We did not see them before we moved to Chicago. During that time we heard that they had joined a reputable Bible teaching church. Five years later my mother died, and while I was standing in a very lengthy receiving line at the visitation, I saw John and Sue. They were very genuine in their expression of condolence. I sensed that God had been changing their hearts.

It was not until six months later, however, when my father was near death in a hospital room, that I witnessed that change. My sister and brother-in-law were in the room with me when John appeared at the door. (My brother-in-law was one of the original men in the church plant and enjoyed as close a friendship with John as I had.) As we talked about my father's condition, John looked at us and said, "You know, I was really off base when we left Grace Church." He was confessing his sin. My brother-in-law and I quickly accepted it and admitted that we were all struggling to work through our theology in those days. In the midst of a personally grievous time, my heart leapt for joy because a brother had been restored, and a cleavage in the body of Christ had been mended.

Confrontation comes no easier than confession, yet God has ordained both of these habits for a healthy church. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone" (Matt. 18:15). "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). Ideally, these two brothers should meet one another on the road to reconciliation. This rarely happens in the ideal. Usually one person must overcome her fear or swallow his pride in order to confront or confess.

When a church neglects these two habits, fissures form deep below the surface of fellowship. Relationships stagnate over the years, never able to traverse the crevices of mistrust that develop from transgressions. The joy of restored relationships, however, far outweighs the struggle to practice these habits. I wonder what joy it brings to our Father in heaven when his children implement these habits by faith, and His Church moves closer to the oneness that the three persons of the Godhead enjoy.

Pastor Stan