

CHURCH PLANTING IS MESSY

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Church planting is messy because people are messy. Four nights of every week are spent training four different groups of church planters. All are in various stages with their newly forming house church groups. Anyone engaged in church planting will quickly find they are up against some messy situations.

We usually approach the tough messy questions from three angles. I admit to having used the first two, but believe the third is the best.

1) The urge is often to run to my library of heavily marked writings and see what David Watson, Neil Cole, Curtis Sergeant, Wolfgang Simson, Tony and Felicity Dale, Steve Atkerson, George Patterson or Frank Viola have to say about the matter. After all, they are the CP experts, right?

While I have greatly benefited from the writings and teachings of these, I have learned that each case is fairly unique to the particular situation. Therefore there are few copy-and-paste answers that work neatly every time.

2) A second solution is to come up with a string of related Bible verses. Sew these together into a logical argument, and *voila!* you have a Biblical answer taken straight from God's Word. Most times this approach will be accepted because no one wants to be seen as questioning God's Word. But is this an accurate way of handling Scripture and answering people's real life questions?

While I admit that we have used both of the above ways to answer problem situations, I'll save the third approach until after describing some of the kinds of issues and questions we deal with on a weekly basis.

What follows are just some of the dozens of practical questions we dealt with in last week's training times.

When we had the Lord's Supper this week as a meal, like you said was the NT practice, we had mostly non-believers present. We felt bad leaving them out of the meal so we invited them to share with us. Did we sin?

We have eight people ready for baptism in our house church. When I shared this with my pastor he told me I had done a good job, and that the church was planning a baptism service for late May. Since we were taught in the training that it is the responsibility of disciples to baptize ASAP those they win to the Lord, I asked him if it would be all right for me to baptize them myself now? He said no. The church would get into trouble with the denomination if he allowed such a thing without proper credentials of the one baptizing. So brother Guy, "What do I do? Obey my pastor like Hebrews 13:17 tells me (*in the most widely accepted Spanish translation 13:17 literally says, 'obey your pastors and be subject to them'*)? Or do I do what I think is the Biblical mandate for disciples to baptize their disciples? Who do I disobey? If I choose to disobey my pastor, there will be serious

consequences for me and my family in the church."

In one of the most exciting new church plants, it was revealed this past week to be led by a brother who has destroyed the last two churches he started due to his immorality. With the training received from us, this brother has now started a third church. This week we were confidentially made aware of the situation. While the brother seems repentant for his past sins, do we allow him to continue with the new church plant? Who decides what should be done in these situations? Are we who have been invited to train some kind of authoritative ruling body to decide these kinds of issues? What will this do to their faith once the ugly truth comes out? Who will take over the new group and continue the work with them?

If the Bible speaks of bread and wine as being the two symbolic elements of the Lord's Supper, why do we substitute the Biblical wine for grape GatorAide, grape Kool-Aide, grape juice, grape soda (*all very common practices in evangelical churches here*)? If we can substitute anything purple in color for the Biblical wine, what is to keep us from doing the same thing with the bread? Can rice or cookies be substituted for the bread, and mora juice (black berry) if we don't have wine and unleavened bread?

I bet you are curious as to how we answered each of the above! How would you have responded? With quotes from church planting experts? Or with sewn together "proof texts" taken from related Biblical passages? None of the above were hypothetical mind exercises. They are real questions from real situations that came out of last week's training sessions.

So what is the third way we approach matters in giving answers to these kinds of questions?

3) Rely on the Holy Spirit for his wisdom and guidance into all truth. He is the author of truth. For dozens of years I have read His Word, and read countless books on subjects related to God's Word. The Spirit living within brings to mind all this stored knowledge and experience. When asked these kinds of questions, I trust the Holy Spirit to speak through me and answer in a way that brings Glory to God and honors His Word.

Some questions are pretty straight forward as revealed in Scripture. For those situations, it is a matter of speaking the truth in love. But for most of the situations we encounter that aren't clearly addressed in the Bible--such as the above kinds of questions--we must be careful to not just tie together a bunch of Scriptures from Proverbs, Luke, and Acts and make them say what we think should be said. I can certainly do this. I know God's Word. But this approach to Scripture has been extremely harmful to the Body of Christ in my opinion, and has gotten us into more tangled messes than even the original problems.

Will you pray for us that the Lord would give us much wisdom and humility in all these matters? We simply don't have the perfect answers for all the questions that get sent our way. But I do believe we have the Holy Spirit who was given to us by Jesus to help lead and guide us into all truth.

What do you think about all these matters? How do you go about answering the tough and messy questions that arise from your own ministry and church planting?