

THE SEVEN SHARED VALUES IN MÉXICO: TWO VALUES MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

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The Seven Values that define what it means to be a Sovereign Grace church are extremely important in the country of México. They function as a compass that guides us and enables us to stay on the right track while marching on in a spiritual landscape where most basic biblical values are either ignored or neglected. If we did not have the Seven Shared Values, it is most likely that our church, along with the rest of the churches in our region, would have strayed, in one way or another, from the straight path of faithfulness to biblical principles.

The evangelical horizon of our nation contains a mix of ministry values and practices completely foreign and even opposite to those established in Scripture. This makes it almost impossible for any local church to carry out its ministry without being influenced by teachings and practices contrary to most of our Seven Shared Values.

In this article, I will attempt to explain the perspective and the practice of the majority of local evangelical churches both in Ciudad Juárez and in the rest of México, as it pertains to two of our Seven Shared Values: Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching; and Complementarian Leadership in the Home and the Church.

I will focus on these two values because they are perhaps the most absent and, therefore, the ones we need to promote more intentionally in order to help churches throughout México embrace them as fundamental convictions. Then, I will speak briefly of the main ways our church and our region seek to teach and model these values to other pastors from our community and from all over México.

Gospel-Centered Doctrine and Preaching

Perhaps the most prominent and harmful characteristic of today's evangelicalism in México is the sad reality that the doctrine being taught and the sermons being preached are not gospel-centered. Instead, what is normally taught and preached is a false or distorted gospel, centered on the needs and welfare of man more than in the glory of God and the exaltation of Christ. In other words, what is proclaimed the most in México and Latin América are diverse versions of the prosperity gospel.

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This problem is further complicated by the fact that even those churches that have not succumbed to the enticements of the prosperity gospel, generally do not teach doctrine nor preach sermons centered on the gospel. Instead, what is typically taught and preached in those churches is a brand of Christianity in which our approval by God depends on our performance or level of obedience to the commands of Scripture. What is preached are different kinds of moralism and/or legalism, which differ only in form but not in substance.

Here are just some of the factors that contribute to this spiritual tragedy:

- The great majority of lead pastors in our city and nation have not received any kind of formal theological training, nor have they been equipped on the importance of giving the person and work of Jesus Christ the preeminence they must have in all teaching and preaching.
- A high percentage of those who currently serve as pastors in México were self-appointed as senior pastors or were installed in their roles only

because they are children or close relatives of the former senior pastor. The critical task of biblically ascertaining a genuine call of God upon a man's life is never carried out. As a result, most pastors assume their roles without being evaluated or confirmed on the basis of whether they meet the character and doctrinal requirements spelled out in Scripture. All of this leads to the sad conclusion that a significant percentage of leaders who currently serve as pastors in México were never called nor gifted by God to serve in that capacity.

- This unfortunate pastoral/ministerial picture is made even worse by the fact that almost all pastors in México carry out their ministries alone and isolated. It is very unusual for a pastor to have a mentor or a fellow elder to whom he can go when facing affliction or adversity, or simply to have fellowship or ask for counsel or advice, and much less to practice accountability or to have someone speak to his life. In México, the practice of accountability is totally foreign.

Sadly, all of the above is the rule and not the exception, not only for pastors of independent churches but also for pastors whose churches are affiliated even with the largest denominations of our nation. This is because most denominations do not assign a high priority to the relational aspect of ministry. As a result, they do not provide their elders with the care and encouragement every pastor needs.

Complementarian Leadership in the Home and the Church

In our country, the outlook regarding complementarianism is just as bleak as in the case of gospel-centered preaching and teaching. This is especially true when it comes to male leadership in the church.

In flagrant indifference and negligence towards the requirements established in God's Word for those who aspire to the office of elder or bishop (1 Tim. 3:2), a rather high and growing percentage of local churches are led by women who hold the title and position of senior pastor. An even higher percentage of local churches are led by a man who functions as the senior pastor and by his wife, who is also formally appointed as co-pastor, with authority to teach and preach to both men and women. A sad outcome is that many of these wives-pastors have an equal or even greater influence than their husbands.

In some cases, this practice is the result of faulty hermeneutics, which leads to the erroneous idea that since husband and wife are "one flesh" before God (Gen. 2:24), that confers upon wives the same rights and the same ministerial authority their husbands' possess. Another argument, purely pragmatic, which is occasionally used as justification for the pastor's wife functioning as co-pastor and teaching and preaching to the entire congregation, is the fact that she might have a remarkable speaking gift and the additional and irrefutable fact that she is often mightily used by God to bless and edify the church. This disregards the fact that God never based these roles on gifting but on his Word.

Ways in Which We Promote Our Shared Values

One of the main ways in which we seek to promote the Seven Shared Values is by inviting as many pastors in México as possible to attend a Pastors Conference. It is hosted each year in our church, Iglesia Gracia Soberana de Cd. Juárez and is called "Fieles a Su Llamado" ("Faithful to His Calling"). By the grace of God, we had about 350 pastors and leaders with their wives attend last year's conference in July. It is worth mentioning that those pastors and leaders came from as many as 17 different states of our nation, which represents a little more than 50% of the 32 states that comprise the Republic of México.

We thank God for the great blessing this conference is for all those who attend. While attending the conference, the pastors and leaders are exposed in every plenary session and in every breakout session not only to excellent gospel-centered preaching and teaching but also to the Seven Shared Values of our dear family of churches. We hope and pray that this will result in more and more churches embracing little by little each one of our shared biblical convictions.

Another very effective tool we've been using to promote gospel-centered preaching is the expository preaching workshops that take place once a year in Juárez (since 2014) and in our Sovereign Grace church of Guadalajara (since 2017). Back in 2014, our church began a formal partnership with the Charles Simeon Trust in order to promote expository preaching among the pastors of our nation and the rest of Latin América. By God's grace, that initiative has produced amazing results. From the small beginning of having held just one workshop in all of Latin America in 2014 (the first one we had

here in our Juárez church), there are now five workshops held each year in different Mexican cities (including the ones in Juárez and Guadalajara). In total, there are twenty-two workshops per year in different nations around Latin América! And the number of workshops keeps growing year after year. We need to pray for God to raise more qualified instructors because more than twenty requests for a workshop are turned down each year in our continent due to the lack of qualified instructors.

Conclusion

We'll never stop thanking God for the tremendous impact, and importance our Seven Shared Values have had for decades on our church and for the same positive influence they are currently having on all the churches of the region God is allowing us to develop. Our deepest longing and constant petition before our Lord Jesus Christ is that he will grant us the grace and resources to plant, adopt, and relate to the greatest number of churches possible in order that all of them may be impacted and edified as a result of embracing our biblical convictions, the Shared Values that define what it means to be a Sovereign Grace Church. And may all this happen to the praise of the glory of His grace.

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