

## “Staying Sane by Looking Local”

In the celebration of the new year, my wife said to me recently, “Get ready for the crazy.” By “crazy”, she meant the year of a presidential election. Just as when people can lose their minds because a circus comes into town, we find ourselves as a nation considering the election of a ringleader. How do we stay sane?

I have the creeping suspicion that too much consideration goes into a national election. I am not suggesting that it is unimportant since it is a civic responsibility. Instead, I mean that too much attention is paid to the larger realm in proportion to those in closer proximity to us. I mean too little attention is given to other equally as, if not more, important areas of life.

In fact, I find a biblical pattern for Christians to pay attention to local spheres of life. For example, when Jeremiah spoke to God’s people in exile, he told them to seek the welfare of Babylon by building up their families, by practicing neighborliness, by doing their work honorably, and by praying for the city (29:4-7). The Lord instructs his people to pay attention to other spheres of life, such as family, neighborhoods, and places of work, suggesting that they are how the larger city will benefit.

The same emphasis is found in Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul teaches in the first three chapters about the universal reign of Jesus. Beginning with chapter 4, Paul narrows the application of Christ’s reign over all the nations by focusing on the life of the church and the family.

A reason for this emphasis is because these local spheres provide greater opportunity to cultivate holiness, or virtue. In the local associations citizens learn to take responsibility for actions and to consider the needs of others. It can hurt more when one is a jerk to a neighbor than when one writes something on Facebook.

Where does the church fit into this? They are the family of God that together strives to walk in a manner worthy of the calling. They are the people of God who cultivate holiness in their marriages, with their children, and among their neighbors. They are the Christians who do their work honorably. In other words, Christians can stay sane by cultivating holiness among those in closest proximity. By doing so, they stand to the other side of the larger circus, telling others that the cure for the crazy is only Christ, for he alone is the just and good king over all the nations. And they evidence his kingship in their own lives by faithfully following Him amongst their neighbors. Stay sane by looking local.

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