

Whats in Your Small Group?

Why churches need to hold Sunday school teachers and small group leaders accountable.
Church Central

Perhaps you have seen or heard the credit card commercial that ends with the question, "What's in your wallet?" The implication is that the credit card in question is superior to others, so you should have one in your wallet.

As I meet with leaders of churches, I am asking a question for a different reason: "What's in your small groups or Sunday school classes?" Simply stated, I want to know if they know what's being taught in these groups.

The Disconcerting Response

Most of the responses I have received are troubling. Most pastors and other leaders do not know what is being taught in small groups and Sunday school classes in their churches.

Many of the leaders are fearful that, by providing guidelines for teaching, the struggle to get and retain teachers will be exacerbated. "We already have to beg people to teach," one pastor told us. "If we start telling them what to teach, we won't stand a chance of having enough teachers."

Some of the other church leaders with whom I spoke simply have not given much thought to the small group/Sunday school/education ministry of their churches. There is no accountability because none is required.

But these same leaders would never let random teaching and preaching take place in the pulpit. Shouldn't we be concerned with the quality of what is taught in smaller church groups, just as we are with what is preached in the worship services?

The Reasons for Accountability

One of the many mistakes I made as a pastor was not being closely involved in the education ministry of the church. If I were to do it over again, I would work closely with other leaders in the church to make certain that all teachers had some level of accountability for what they taught in the Sunday school classes or small groups. Why is this accountability important?

Without accountability biblical teaching can be weak, erroneous, or even heretical.

Plus, teacher accountability helps the church move in the same direction with the same vision. That which is taught in groups can complement other teachings in the church. For example, the small group or Sunday school studies can complement the pastor's sermons each week.

Addressing the Challenge

How then can we get serious about having strong biblical teaching in our groups with clear accountability? How can we expect more of our teachers without losing them?

One church addressed the issue by having fewer teachers and more facilitators. They actually went to a master teaching model without reducing the number of groups and classes. Over half of the class time is spent in combined groups led by a master teacher. They would then divide into their regular classes with a facilitator who coordinated a discussion of the teaching.

Ultimately, we may need to raise the bar for teachers in our classes and groups. Perhaps we have anemic teaching and weak accountability because we expect nothing more. Perhaps we need to hold our teachers to some of the highest levels of accountability. The Bible is clear that not all should be teachers of the Word: "Not many should be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment" ([James 3:1](#), HCSB).

You have heard me and others bemoan the state of local churches in America. Perhaps many of our churches are weak because so many church members are not well grounded biblically. And perhaps many members are not well grounded biblically because our churches have made little to no concerted effort to increase the quality and the accountability of the teachers of Scripture.

So, what's in your small groups or Sunday school classes?

Thom Rainer is the president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. © 2010
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