Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.
And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault.
For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.
And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.
Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?
He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.
Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.
For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.
And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.
For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death:
But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free.
And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;
Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.
And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:
There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.
If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.
And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.
And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;
Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?
And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.
For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,
Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceits, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Introduction:

In the month of April, I began a very important process of self-evaluation. I first took a good look at myself to determine how I could do a better and more efficient job as the Senior Pastor of FBBC. This led me to begin to look at the church and attempt to determine what we do well and what we don’t.

These personal inquiries led to what we know as the S.W.O.T. process. Several meetings were held in which different leadership groups met to have some candid conversations about the past, present, and future of our church. Honest and open conversation was encouraged, and I chose to attend none of these meetings so that people could feel free to respectfully critique any and every aspect of church life.

All meetings were facilitated by staff pastors who shared with me a desire to make “body life” better in the days to come. All of the lists of information, good and bad, were put together and listed in order of frequency, urgency and priority.
From this extensive list several things of concern surfaced as the most important and critical issues to address. Along with these we noted the many strengths and resources that FBBC has amassed to face the future, among them the many talented and dedicated people.

During this time we spent our Sunday mornings going BACK2CHURCH. I shared a series of messages that reminded us what a local New Testament Church was commissioned to do and how we were to do it. We started with Worship and ended at Vision. We noted four key pillars of the church in which we could sum up our mission, Connect, Grow, Serve, Go. This series of messages essentially took the whole summer. The series concluded with Vertical Church on 9/15 and This Generation Now, our Vision casting Sunday, on 9/16.

Nationally, with 80% of Christian young people walking away from the church after high school graduation, we asked ourselves "why?" Then we determined to do everything we could to build This Generation Now. Before we can effectively help our young people, we need to be “the Church,” a genuine, vibrant, compassionate and loving church.

Our Bible conference followed where we reiterated our vision and focused on being a church that will more than meet the needs of our young people. Success depends heavily upon the adult population of FBBC taking the challenge before us most seriously.

In the last few weeks, several leadership and strategy groups have been formed to address specific components of our vision. Among them: small groups, worship, assimilation, stewardship and oversight teams.

Several meetings have been held to address every important component of our vision. All of this is absolutely necessary before we will see the obvious results of all of the work and discussions. However, you will see changes for the better popping up all around you.
Today we must address the need for internal change, heart change for FBBC. The message will focus on the heart of our church. As humans we are naturally and inescapably attracted by what we see — externals. We make value judgments based upon what our senses first experience. Frankly, it is almost impossible to avoid this. The rubber meets the road not by avoiding these judgments but by overcoming them. We must overcome our personal bias, prejudice, preferences and presumptions to be the Body of Christ.

In His incarnation Jesus put no emphasis on status and the externals of life. He intentionally was born in an animal feeding trough. He came as a baby, a carpenter, born to common parents of no social standing. He lived, ate, worked, and clothed Himself as a common man. He made Himself of “no reputation” confirming that what one sees on the outside pales in importance to that which is inside. Before FBBC will begin to realize its vision, there must be significant internal adjustments. FBBC must be a church where everyone is graciously invited and welcomed. There is no room for prejudice in the body. True equality is found in the Body, the Church.

As God's people we are to look past the outside, the externals, and focus on the eternal needs of individual souls bound for an eternity, somewhere. We must not allow self-righteous, elitist, prejudicial attitudes cloud our vision to reach every soul with the love of Christ.

Illustration:
The Story of the Jesus People

5 Statements on Tradition:

• There is nothing wrong with tradition. It is neither inherently good nor bad.

• Tradition should never be elevated to have equal status or authority with Scripture.
• Tradition should never trump Bible truth. Man’s traditions can never violate truth.

• If there is not biblical basis for a belief, at best it is merely a bias, prejudice or preference. This is what traditions are made of.

• If one’s heart is filled with bias, prejudice and preference, truth will be neglected, violated and ignored.

What is the heart of the church supposed to look like if it is going to be the Hope of the world?

Alive not Dead

The church is made up of individuals who are alive in Christ. Christ came to bring life, abundant life. The doctrine of the Resurrection speaks of life, eternal life. The “new birth” speaks of new life. When we come to worship together it should be a celebration!

Love not Hate

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death,” 1 John 3:14.

John 13:34, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

The church is to be filled with love. This is no place to be at odds with another. Confession is made and forgiveness granted, quickly.

Forgiving not Condemning
John 3:17, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”

Jesus’s ministry was not one of condemnation but reconciliation, justification and forgiveness.

Truth not Tradition

“Thy word is truth.” Tradition is neither inherently good nor evil. Sometimes tradition can be so powerful that it trumps truth. Tradition can become so ingrained that it is difficult to distinguish between truth and tradition.

When I became a Christian I had been so indoctrinated in tradition, that it was difficult to distinguish between the two.

“We have never done it that way!”

Freedom not Bondage

Christ is the Savior. He has freed us from the chains of death and sin. Christ sets the captive free! Sadly churches have a tendency to place believers into bondage to man-made rules and regulations.

Bondage is designed to control and limit free expression. God has created diversity. Cookie-cutter Christianity is limiting and potentially destructive. People are robbed of their joy and freedom.

Acceptance not Rejection

More than anything else people want to have a sense of belonging. The younger a person is the more critical this factor is.
Feeling special, important, noticed, pampered, welcome, greeted, or respected help break down barriers to assimilation. Every kind of class of people must feel that they are not only welcomed but encouraged to attend.

**Romans 15:7**, “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”

**John 8:3-11**

**Desire not Duty**

“God loves a cheerful giver.”

**II Cor. 5:14, 15**, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

The Christian should be driven by love and desire. It is commendable when one is obedient, it is even better when one *loves* obedience.

Christians are called to live by grace. We are not attempting to please out of duty but in response to His grace out of pure thankfulness.

**Transformation not Modification**

Transformation is an “inside job,” the work of the Holy Spirit.

II Cor. 15:17 – the emphasis is on the inside no the outside.

**Romans 12:1,2**, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.
2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Jesus changes everything!

The church should be offering and expecting life change.

The church is the hope of the world.

Christianity is not “behavior modification,” it is internal and spiritual transformation.

**Authentic not Hypocritical**

Leaders must be real, genuine, spirit-filled Christians. Fakers cannot be tolerated. Living by external appearances is superficial and deceptive. Looking good is not enough.

We need to be the real deal: love, joy, peace —charitable, giving and forgiving, patient, kind and generous.

Hypocrisy discourages the younger, less experienced Christian.

Authentic — grace, healing, belonging, missional, sacrifice, the other first

Ministering specifically to the most broken and needy people

Help, hope, healing, honest

**People not Place**

The church is not an organization; it is not a building; it is not an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The church is the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is the people who have been placed “in Christ” through the Baptism
of the Holy Spirit as the direct result of a genuine conversion experience facilitated by repentance and faith, executed in the grace of God.

Our building is worthless unless it is used as a means to provide help, healing and hope for people.

We seek to maintain the buildings with excellence, but they never take precedence over people. The buildings will be used and worn out by people: service, activities, ministry, community, etc.

The church building is used by people who need help, healing and hope.

**Relationships not Religion**

Love God, love people.

Christianity was never intended to be the repository of rules, regulations, traditions, liturgies, pomp and circumstance, religious costuming and calendars.

Jesus was a common man. The church should be inviting to common people.

**Jeremiah 9:23, 24**, “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

The church is the hope of the world. The church should be accessible to all.

**Compassion not Condescension**

The ultimate goal is to bring the message of hope, healing and help to every soul. We must work to remove any barriers that stand between “us” and
“them.” We are not merely doing the socially inferior a favor. We are loving them with the love of God.

Pride, arrogance, haughtiness and self-righteousness have no place in the church.

Christians should see and sense the lost-ness and brokenness of the world.

**Conclusion:**