

5 Dangers of Unaligned Small Groups

The first time I encountered this issue was in a church consultation nearly twenty years ago. I asked the pastor to tell me what was being taught in the church's small groups. He seemed to be nonplused in his response: "I have no idea." I was taken aback.

I tried a different approach. "Tell me," I said, "how the church decides what will be taught in the small groups." Again, I was unprepared for his response: "The church leaders have no input into what small groups teach," he said. "We let every class decide on its own. We don't want to be like dictators telling them what they have to do. They decide according to what's best in their own eyes."

So, I continued, "I guess you let anybody teach or preach anything from the pulpit on Sunday mornings?"

"Of course not," he said with some indignation. "We are very strict about the Sunday morning preaching. If I'm not teaching, then we have someone who is closely aligned to where we are going and what we believe."

He did not get my attempt to **connect the approach of the small groups with that of the Sunday morning teaching and preaching**. How can you be so concerned about one and so nonchalant about the other?

Over the years I have been surprised to find out how many church leaders have a laissez faire attitude about what is being taught in small groups and Sunday school classes. Allow me to share five dangers of this unaligned, "anything goes" approach.

1. **Because preaching is held to a higher standard, the perception becomes that the small group teaching is just not that important.** The reality is that most small groups or Sunday school classes spend more time in their groups than the time they take to listen to a sermon.
2. **The vision of the church could be distracted or derailed.** When the preaching and small group teaching are not aligned, the small groups can become alternative little churches with their own vision and priorities. Unfortunately, I have seen this reality a number of times.
3. **It opens the door for heretical teaching.** I know of one church that gave no thought to the content of the teaching in the small groups. They would soon discover that one group was studying a book that denied the deity of Christ.
4. **It takes away from the unity of the church.** The preaching is headed in one direction. The small group teaching is headed in another direction, or multiple directions. There is no unity in what the church is learning or how the members are growing spiritually.
5. **It does not allow for strategic teaching.** Indeed, the contrary may be true. The teaching in the small groups can negate the strategic intent of the preaching plan of the pastor.

Leaders in churches need not be autocratic in their desire to get small group teaching aligned with the ministry of the church. It can and should be a mutually agreed upon goal to move people toward greater maturity in Christ with clear and known material.

Indeed many churches are now moving to a uniform curriculum across all ages in all small groups and Sunday school classes. I see this development as a healthy trend. The leaders are making a statement that what is taught in every group is vitally important for the spiritual health of the members and for the church as a whole.

How does your church decide what is taught in its small groups or Sunday school classes? How would you evaluate its effectiveness?

Read more from Thom [here](#).

Would you like to learn more about small groups and/or a discipling process? [Connect with an Auxano Navigator and start a conversation with our team.](#)