

Broken Churches?

By Bob Young

In the United States today, some are questioning whether our political system is broken. Those questions suggest to me similar questions concerning the church. These are not questions about whether God's eternal, biblical plan for the church is flawed. The problem is not one of theory but of practice. A broken political system is one that is not functioning as it should. A broken church is one that is not functioning as it should. "Are some local congregations broken?" If so, "What causes the brokenness, and how could such churches become functional again?"

Are some local congregations broken?

→ An affirmative response is suggested by meager results. Generally, congregations that are not growing numerically are not functioning as they could or should. Some are incapable of maintaining themselves financially, organically, spiritually or numerically. A large number fail to reach out locally with the saving gospel message. Even more are not involved in taking the gospel to the nations of the world.

What are the causes of brokenness?

→ While one might mention various secondary factors—aging demographics where the church no longer reflects the surrounding culture and has less energy and resources to accomplish its tasks; globalization which has changed the culture into which the church is called to carry the gospel; technological innovation that is impacting communication, relationships, and opportunities; the primary causes focus around lack of self-understanding, faulty internal relationships, lack of outreach, and misunderstandings of the nature of spiritual leadership and the nature of ministry.

→ In some places, the church is broken theologically. It does not understand itself. It has lost sight of its purpose in God's eternal scheme.

→ Some churches are broken organically, failing to function as a living organism with interacting parts. This happens when a church fails to connect its members in meaningful spiritual fellowship.

→ Outreach falters when an inward, maintenance-oriented turn causes the church to focus more on itself and its own needs, facilities, and activities, rather than giving first priority to its missional challenge to take the gospel to the world.

→ Leaders are not leading. The result is a lack of leadership, lack of shepherding, lack of accountability, and lack of maintaining faithful members.

→ Ministers are not ministering and church leaders are not leading in biblical ways. This is evident in a comparison of what the Bible teaches about ministry and leadership with the way ministry and leadership is done in the churches. This is evident in a lack of biblical activity and work by those who are primarily charged with overseeing the planning and implementation of the work of the local congregation. This is evident in a lack of involvement of the members, given that ministry and leadership includes equipping the members for the work of ministry, helping them become active.

How could such churches become functional again? Here are five useful concepts to inform a successful intervention.

- The church must be guided to a greater understanding of the Word of God. The church must catch a glimpse of God's vision for the church.
- The church must be helped to develop greater unity and deep, fraternal love.
- The church must be encouraged to keep growing—in knowledge, in spirit, and numerically.
- The church must be challenged to develop into a missionary church.
- The church must be develop healthy understandings of leadership and ministry as the foundation for developing leaders—teachers, elders and deacons.