

**What is the church supposed to be? What is the church supposed to do?**  
**A Two-Part Bible Study**  
**By Bob Young**

**Introduction**

Darrell Guder (*Missional Church*) challenges the contemporary church to consider that the Christian “vocation”<sup>1</sup> is missional<sup>2</sup>. That is, Christians are called and sent to represent the reign of God. Guder maintains that this truth requires that the church be redefined: no longer as a place but as a people of God. When the church is defined as a people—vibrant, active, and organic, the institutional model of church that has developed the church as a vendor of religion must be rejected. The modern church almost automatically then asks, “What are we to do if we are in the business of ‘marketing’ or ‘selling’ Christ or Christianity?”

Guder maintains that the “re-vision” of the church requires that God’s people learn how to hear the gospel all over again. The good news is that the reign and rule of God is at hand, beginning in the lives of those disciples (learners) who willingly imitate and follow the Teacher. The reign of God has a missional perspective that is difficult to integrate with traditional (institutional) church concepts. The mission of the people of God is to represent the reign of God. Guder suggests this occurs in three ways. The reign of God is represented by the church as (1) its community, (2) its servant, and (3) its messenger.

This two-part study seeks to integrate these three concepts from Guder with five typical New Testament activities of the church. The five activities are:

- 1 worship, serve God [leitourgia]
- 2 ministering, serve others [diakonia]
- 3 fellowship, sharing [koinonia]
- 4 teaching, doctrine [didache]
- 5 proclamation, evangelism [kerygma]

**Part 1**

**SERVE GOD**

Certainly worship is a part of serving God. But the question must be broadened: how does a Christian serve God? Our concept of God-relationship and God-encounter is severely limited if serving God is limited to worship. Paul describes service to God as a “priestly ministry” (Rom. 15:15-17).

Verses for additional study: Matthew 4:9-10; Rom. 12:1-2; Matthew 25:31-46.

Which of Guder’s three identities are reflected in serving God?

What is the difference in your mind between worship and service?

How does a careful distinction between serving God and worshipping God help answer the question about whether all of life is worship? If worship is intentional, is it really possible that all of life is worship? Is it possible that all of life is service to God? Study Rom. 12:1-2.

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<sup>1</sup> Vocation comes from the Latin word for “calling”. One good example of this concept appears in Ephesians 4:1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Missional has as its root idea that of being sent. The Latin root is approximately equivalent to the Greek apostello, from which we get our word apostle (one sent). Using the concepts of mission, missionary, and missional avoids confusion with apostleship.

What might be involved in your own personal “service to God” when the concept is extended beyond worship?

## **SERVE OTHERS**

The Greek word for ministry or service is the word from which we get our word deacon. We often have the idea that service or ministry in the church is limited to the work of “ministers”, or deacons, or other church leaders.

The idea of service is not limited to offices or officials.

Here are some of the places in the New Testament where this word is used: Matt. 20:26; Rom. 13:4; Rom. 15:8; 16:1; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:7, 23, 25; 1 Th. 3:2; 1 Tim. 4:6.

Which of the above texts catches your attention, either by using the word in an unexpected way or applying it to a person you had not thought of in this respect?

Which of Guder’s three identities are reflected in serving others?

Read Acts 2:36-47. How did the early church serve one another? What are some specific examples of activities that would have required “ministry”?

## **FELLOWSHIP**

We use the word easily. What do we mean? What do others hear? Religious “jargon” leads to misunderstanding and miscommunication. “Do we use the word biblically?” We talk about fellowship dinners, fellowship halls, and refer to social events as opportunities for fellowship. Biblical fellowship (Greek, *koinonia*) is more than these things!

The word translates into English with words like fellowship, communion, and contribution. It describes relationships—marriage, business, spiritual. The context determines the meaning. Three major words used to translate *koinonia* are association, participation, and sharing.

>>\*1 Those who share fellowship **associate** with one another. Being a family depends on fellowship. Being born of the same birth and filled with the same Spirit, and sharing the same Abba Father unites Christians in a common association. The “tie the binds” is not recreational, social, economic, or racial. Where there is no association there is no fellowship. If a Christian ceases to associate with other Christians, that person is outside the fellowship by definition.

>>\*2 Fellowship involves **participation**. One baptized into Christ is a child of God, a part of the body of Christ, a dwelling place of the Spirit. Thus fellowship demands participation and identity with others who are likewise children of God, members of the body, and Holy Spirit filled. To seek fellowship without participation is a contradiction.

>> \*3 **Sharing** is a part of genuine fellowship. Fellowship demands mutuality, caring, sharing. Suffer with the suffering, rejoice with the honored. Put others ahead of self. (1 Cor. 12:26; Rom. 12:15-16; Phil. 2:1-4). Sharing with others brings commonality or things “in common” (Acts 2:42). Interesting—communion, common, community. The early church shared fellowship because they shared Christ—common priorities, principles, values, goals, and beliefs.

Which of Guder’s three identities are reflected in fellowship?

What does real fellowship look like?

How does the church today experience association? participation? sharing?

Are some of the things we call fellowship not really fellowship? Which ones? Why?

What kinds of things might be lacking in the modern church’s version of fellowship?

Can the church realistically have the same kind of fellowship as the early church?

## **Part 2**

The church is involved in two great and related tasks: teaching and preaching. These are our subject in part two of this study.

### **TEACHING**

The concept of teaching involves two ideas: that which is taught, the process of teaching. See one use of the word in Matt. 7:28-29 which seems to integrate both elements.

This is the Greek word *didache*. There is a significant Christian work from the second century entitled *The Didache (The Teaching)*.

Which of Guder's three identities are reflected in teaching?

Which of the concepts (content or process) seems most in view to you in Acts 2:42? Why?

How does teaching relate to the more contemporary concepts of nurturing, spiritual development, and discipleship? Are they the same or different? How?

What kinds of things do you think the church should be teaching?

What kinds of things do people today need to know?

How would you rate the teaching program of the church?

How could it be improved?

### **PREACHING**

Some have sought to distinguish preaching or proclamation (*kerygma*, heralding) from the announcement of the good news (*evangelism*). That is, *kerygma* is proclamation for Christians and *evangelism* is proclamation for non-Christians. The distinction is difficult to sustain given the New Testament use of the words.

Which of Guder's three identities are reflected in preaching?

Is preaching something the church does? Why or why not? If yes, how?

How would you respond if some asked you, "Is yours a church with good news?"

How important is preaching in your view? Why is it or is it not important?

Does your thinking about the importance of preaching change if one uses the word proclamation? if one uses the word evangelism?

How does preaching connect to the words in Acts 2? (testify, exhort)