

A Study of “The Church”: Session 2

Integrating Church and Ministry: Identity and Tasks

By Bob Young

THE CHURCH

What is the meaning of God for our lives?

The focus of this study is not a system, not a movement, not the church of Christ, but is Christ. The focus is on the person of Jesus. What does it mean to be a community of believers in our world?

MINISTRY

Understanding and Integrating Church and Ministry

The church has a ministry. Christians are ministers/servants.

We cannot understand the church without understanding first this aspect of the church, Eph. 4:11-13.

The final goal is the maturity of Christians.

Point of beginning is the formation of a people as instruments for God.

The task of the church is unchanging: to present Jesus to the world; to help people find God, and then to grow in Christ.

Matt. 28:18-20.

This requires a mix of the message and the messenger, 2 Cor. 4:6-7; Phil. 1:16

When we understand that every Christian is a minister or servant, we understand that God calls servants, and servants are not jealous. We are not in competition.

The beginning of a successful (faithful) ministry in a local church is personal integrity.

1 Cor. 11:1; Accept our task to imitate Jesus and model discipleship, 1 Tim. 4:15-16, note the order. Guard the integrity of one's heart and life.

Preaching is the process by which a man of God speaks; it is not just the message. Ministry is a person of God living out God's reality in this world.

Personal integrity leads to genuineness of Christian character.

Be who you are. You are called to be a Christian with your own personal identity (that is, who you are), consistent with your personality, style, etc.

Character and skills are intrinsically interwoven, be consistent.

Integrity is required, but integrity is not perfectionism.

As a minister, preacher, I must be open and honest in the spiritual struggle.

I must confront my sin in the light of God's grace, with humility and transparency.

The grace of God cannot act through one upon whom the grace of God has not acted.

Personal integrity will identify us as one of the wounded.

This corresponds to and makes possible our responsibility to serve as models.

Integrity with the Word, written and living

- Christians must be convinced of access to God, humbled before him and serious about communicating God's word.

- Sharing the word of God, the gospel, is never a bottom-up process, but is always a top-down process, because ultimately God is speaking.
- Evangelism must never degenerate into a process of scolding, challenge to morality, or mere theory.

Integrity in Ministry of the church

- Ministry is the task or process of bringing people to encounter Christ through the Word of God. This is the goal of our writing, teaching, preaching, speaking. This is the focus of all we do.
- Are we bringing people to encounter Christ; to approach closer to Christ?
- What makes the ministry of the church in the gospel legitimate—is the belief that the most important thing in the world is that the community of Christ, the people of God, meet God in his Word.
- Ministry enables the encounter of the human soul and the eternal word.
- The proclamation of the Word is to present the incarnate Christ.
- Ministry must never be demeaned or depreciated.
- We must commit to the word in the midst of sensitivity to the culture.
- To be a teacher or preacher is to be a serious student of the Word.

Integrity in Relationships

- All human beings are united in human frailty, Heb. 2:14ff. The church must share our humanity as participants in the “human predicament.”
- If we are to minister, that signifies that we must do more than teach and preach.
- We must learn to love people. We are sharers with people in the same condition (human), we are never to exist in isolation because we are ministers. We must be always accessible.

Integrity with God

- The word of God revealing God provides encounter with God, Isaiah 6.
- This is an eternal perspective, cosmic, mind of Christ, cross-centered. It is an awareness and acknowledgement of the divine agenda.
- Christianity is also a process of casting a vision for God’s people in this world.
- Christian ministry is showing people how to connect their story with “the story.”
- Such teaching presents Christ as real, confronts culture, provides a new way of thinking, a new point of view, a new world view, a new mindset.
- We minister out of gratitude for grace received, it is the basis of our humility and our motivation for sharing the good news. We will not serve well until we are broken before God.

Ministry demands and depends on the very opposite of authoritarianism. This alternative concept of church, in contrast with much of what we see around us, is rooted in grace. This integrity which integrates ministry and church has implications in several areas.

SALVATION

I love my children most when they fail the worst.

Faith is trusting God more than we trust ourselves. Faith is always focused in an object.

Repentance says two things: Sin—I hate it. God—I love him.

Two levels:

Standing, status—before God we are perfect, righteous, redeemed, justified, and this status is conferred by God through grace. This is our already status.

Performance—Phil. 2:12, salvation has been put in you, now let it work out of you, flow out of you.

This is not perfection, human righteousness. Isa. 64:6. This is our not yet standing.

Contrast justification and sanctification: justification is always at 100%; sanctification varies.

WORSHIP

Theology of Worship—In worship, I demonstrate my acceptance of the gift.

I am a sinner for whom Christ died.

That is central, all the rest is peripheral.

We are homeless and destitute without heaven; we are hopeless without Christ.

I am worthy of being saved only to the extent that I know my unworthiness.

When we are broken by the cross, then we are carried to the heavenlies, Ephesians 1.

Effective ministry provides critical insights into his times.

I reveal the presence of God in the world with my words.

The importance of the church and its ministry is clearly seen, based on our personal opportunity, gifts God gives, personal desire and motivations, the providence of God, our experiences, our awareness of God's presence in the world, and our willingness to commit.

CHURCH

We need to develop a specific, clear understanding of the church, Eph. 3:16-21

To build a church is not a reference to maintaining an institution; to build a church is to pursue a kingdom agenda, to be focused. Such an agenda is localized, specific.

Three reasons to study the church:

1. To apply the Bible in our world correctly and effectively. We are part of a changing world, teaching/doctrine operates in tension between the church and the world. We must continually rethink our faith. The Bible is normative. It is terminal revelation.

We must understand biblical principles. We must identify a faith for today, founded on Scripture, not determined by culture. Understanding the church is a continuing task. We take our clue for being from Scripture; we take some of our actions from culture. What is our responsibility?

We in churches of Christ have typically identified a pattern theology, which we can also call a "forms" theology, but remember that forms are often derived from the culture. The idea of a principle-based understanding of the church is new to us. Bible truth does not change, but expressions of that truth change.

2. To continue to hear God's call. To be certain we do not lose our calling amidst the concerns of the modern institution.

Are we operating the machinery of the institution or answering God's call. The church is both divine and human. To maintain an institution is a special problem for mission churches.

3. To shape us in humility. When we see the church as God intended, we are aware of our own inability to fulfill the vision of God for his people. The only sensitive response to God's desire in this world is that of Isaiah, Woe is me.

God is superior. He alters our intentions to his glory. We must escape the assumption that things must continue as they are. We must learn to develop an eternal view.

Two aspects of the church are essential for our study: The church as the body of Christ, the church as the assembly, called out, ekklesia.

Our traditional model of identifying the church is to speak of "marks or characteristics of the church." There are many metaphors in the Bible—family, bride, vineyard... (39 metaphors) Must use all, but not require more of any metaphor than it intends to provide.

CHURCH AS BODY OF CHRIST

Primary concept is body of Christ, "soma christou"

This demonstrates the creative adaptive use Paul made, but there is some disparity, 1 Cor. 12:21ff; Eph. 1:22. What is vital is to understand that the identity of the church comes and cannot be separated from the person of Jesus. We must focus on the person and work of Christ to see our identity. Can we believe Eph. 1:22, that the church is fullness, Col. 1:19, 2:9.

CHURCH AS EKKLESIA

Ecclesia, = assembly. Ecclesia is calling together of the citizens of the kingdom, Col. 1:13-14, for a specific purpose.

This suggests that our identity changes when we are together in assembly, we are citizens of the polis, functioning as assembly. We are God polis, this may be clearer than "called out." We are called for a purpose, for a function. We do not cease to be a part of the called out when we leave the meeting, for ecclesia goes forth to represent God in the world.

The church is not extrinsic and irrelevant to Christ. The church is the presence of Christ, that is, makes Christ "happen" in the world. The church is more than the sum of its parts. Unity is not something to create, but something to let happen, something to maintain.

APPLICATIONS

The human body is one because it is animated by the same spirit. So also spiritually. Baptism is meaningless apart from the HS, 1 Cor. 12:12-13; John 3:3-5.

The spiritual body, the church, is thus closely connected with Christ. The church is fullness in a practical sense. Christ is not in the world except through his soma, Heb. 2:1-16. There is no spirit in the world without a body. Thus he had to come in the flesh to redeem somatized people. The world still needs this practical presence of Christ, and it is the church in the world that is Christ's presence. This is not some mystical, ethereal abstraction.

This also means that the Christian does not function independently in the world, but functions through the church. The spirit of Christ within his body, the church, makes us body.

That the church is fullness signifies that we are wholly filled, totality, the whole sum, the entirety, the overflowing.

Interesting parallel: cosmology, world as overflowing of the cup of the gods. That which fills, the act of bringing to fulfillment, Rom. 13:10. The cup of "law" does not contain love. But as overflow, the church enables Christ to function in the world as he desires.

Christ is the fountain, the church is base for collecting the overflow so the world can drink. The church is designed to give away its fullness, for it is not supplied to us only for our own use; we are to serve as a conduit.

What would Christ do in the world if he were still here? Whatever the answer, the church must be doing just that if it is to be faithful. Thus the clearest word from God is Jesus, 2 Cor. 3:18ff.

Eph. 1:22 is the greatest compliment ever given the church. Christ lives in presence and actuality in the world, Christ does not only live in memory.

This provides an important guide for ministry. Jesus Christ is the standard of the church. Jesus Christ is the standard of ministry. We abandon ourselves, there is no comparison (otherwise we have idolatry), we judge all by Jesus Christ.

This allows us to move from considering marks of identity of an institution to our own personal individual responsibility. This moves us from pattern to principle. Here is how we can identify the essence of the church and its ministry: Christ lives among his subjects--the citizens of the kingdom who live in the world.