

Renewing the focus of the church

By Bob Young

The word is changing. The global landscape in which we do ministry and missions is changing. Some do not like change. One must admit that some changes are good. Think with me. My beloved professor, Dr. Raymond Kelcy, often said, “If the teacher wants to teach Tommy the Bible, he must know the Bible and he must know Tommy.” If the church is to take the gospel to the world, the church must know and listen to God, and the church must know and listen to the world. The changing global landscape demands that the church carefully evaluate the focus of its message. This involves the what, the who, and the how of the focus of the church. This article mentions five foci—the message, Jesus, the church, ministry, and leadership.

To avoid losing the vital, viable message, the church must refocus. The church must seek anew the will and way of God in Scripture. In a confusing and confused world, people want clarity. Some find clarity (and comfort) in the declaration that there is no objective truth; this is avoidance. How do we move **from confusion to clarity**? Clarity requires that the church renew its emphasis on the truth of Scripture with a fresh focus on the message of the Bible. We must restudy, rethink, reevaluate. We cannot be satisfied with what we have always thought. We must do more than parrot the past. Faith must be personal, fresh and vibrant. We must personally know and understand the message—we must allow others the same journey.

The church must focus on Jesus. The focus in the world is shifting **from institutional to personal**. I choose my bank based on the people who serve me more than the institutional data sheets. In religion, most people do not begin with institutional concerns (such as definitions and understandings of church). They desire personal relationships—with God, Father, Son and Spirit, and with the people of God. Be my friend. Know me and love me. Tell me about Jesus. Help me know Jesus and love Jesus. Since loving Jesus is the foundation of obeying his word, this is a healthy approach. With Jesus at the center, the power of the word and the plan of God for the church naturally follow.

The church must learn and respect the nature of the church. The church must understand itself in the context of God’s eternal purpose. The focus of the church must not be only internal. The church must look around and reach out with an external focus. The religious landscape is shifting **from an internal focus on the institution to an external focus on persons**. This is the move from maintenance to missional.

The church must recognize and practice the nature of biblical ministry. Ministry is the work of every Christian. Every member is a minister. Ephesians 4 gives church leaders the responsibility of preparing members for the work of ministry or works of service. For church leaders, this is a focus away from **typical ministry or leadership duties toward empowering the church**. This is more than a pastoral model; this is the opportunity for leaders to help others toward ministry. This describes the healthy activity of the church.

The church must honor the nature of leadership. The first responsibility of leaders is not to be decision makers. Biblical leaders are catalysts. The need is to move **from control to empowerment**. Church leaders must learn the value of the empowered, unleashed church. Ours is a time of increased focus on involvement and participation. Young people want to do something. The same is true of almost all church members. Give me something to do. This means that leaders cannot be satisfied with typical pastor roles. The role is pastor-teacher, or teaching-pastor. The change in the world is forcing the church to think again about the role of leaders. The landscape calls leaders to serve as catalysts rather than mere pastors.