



*2020 VISION:  
PRIORITIES TO HELP  
DEVELOP A BIBLICAL  
VISION FOR THE  
CHURCH*

*By Bob Young*



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e-published  
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The author has written and produced a variety of written and recorded resources, most of which can be accessed on his website:

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## **Developing 2020 Vision: Introduction**

*Note: On the first Sunday of January 2000, in an adult Bible class, I briefly presented a list of ten items that needed to be thoughtfully addressed if the church were to have a viable voice in the new millennium. I was asked to expand the list from that Bible class presentation into a series of bulletin articles. Those original articles are still available on my website, under the title, Foundations Series.*

*Now twenty years later, I see a need to revisit, rewrite, and update the original articles. The question is still a valid one, and seems more pressing than ever: how can the church have a viable voice in our contemporary world? What questions must we address? What understandings are essential for Christianity to survive and thrive in the world we know today? In this e-book, the series is being updated and expanded. It is hoped that these germ thoughts will be useful in developing outlines for a sermon series or for seminar presentations.*

*In the rewritten series, I write with the purpose of setting forth the elements of a 20/20 vision. I write with the goal of summarizing basic Bible teachings. Christians must be encouraged to see more clearly the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Churches must be encouraged to set realistic, actionable goals that reflect the basic elements of the Christian faith as efforts are renewed in evangelism and discipleship. Christians must be helped in their struggle to understand what it means to live as a Christian.*

*The ten priorities that I identify in this e-book are divided into three categories of three items each, followed by two summary chapters that explore the challenge of living life in this world as dual-nature beings – human beings who share and participate in the divine nature, and the challenge of living as a Christ-follower who reflects Christ in every aspect of life. First, the church must understand the existence of and the nature of truth, and what it means to say that the Bible is true. How do we know that the*

*Bible is true? How do we know that we can depend on the message of Scripture? Making disciples is possible only when the truth about Jesus is presented, with full confidence in Biblical inspiration and understanding of the principles of Bible interpretation. Second, the church must understand itself. The nature of the church, the unity of the church, and the relationship of the church to the world are three essential elements of that understanding. Third, the church must wrestle with the nature of the Christian experience (what it means to be a Christian), the nature of the Christian mission, and the nature of Christian hope. These nine fundamentals will equip us for the capstone study that integrates our understanding of the human nature and the divine nature.*

*The years will fly by quickly. Can the church learn from what it experiences? Can the apparent decline in Christianity in the U.S. be reversed? Will the church find renewed strength and resolve to present God's truth with boldness, daring, and sensitivity so that future generations of Christians (1) learn how to live in the world without becoming worldly, (2) understand the call to unity amidst diversity, and (3) renew the mission so the primary Christian message is always one of eternal hope? The beginning of 2020 is a good time to begin working toward the eternal purpose that God has for his people.*

The challenges that confront the church grow daily. As one looks back over the last 20 years, it seems that the challenges have grown almost exponentially. Meeting the every-growing number of challenges that confront the church will require the wisdom of God, careful thinking, and disciplined lives.

The list of subjects addressed in this study is not intended to be exclusive. I only suggest some of the most significant concerns. Certainly, the list of concerns the church must address is much longer. Close behind the items included here would be the need to rethink multiple issues surrounding the nature and the work of God. What kind of God is at work in this world? How is he at work? Is his work, as demonstrated in creation, revelation, the

incarnation, and redemption, a "once for all" work, described in the New Testament by the Greek word *hapax*, or a "more and more" work, described by the word *mallon*? What of the work of the Holy Spirit? To think correctly about these and a host of related matters (for example, the nature and power of prayer) will require serious thinking and study to understand God's revealed wisdom. May the time of rethinking our faith begin now so we can fulfill the potential God places within us and meet the challenges God places before us.

Let me briefly expand my description of the contents of this study. The first set of challenges I see is in the general area of Bible knowledge. More than one observer has suggested that a major issue of the 1990s was biblical ignorance. The problem is yet with us and has likely intensified in the first two decades of the 21st century. Three specific areas related to the Bible must be considered. (1) What is the nature of the Bible, what is its relationship to human thought, and what is the nature of truth? (2) What is the nature of biblical inspiration and what impact does it have upon our affirmation of the Scriptures as authoritative? (3) What is a correct process of biblical interpretation, e.g. what is a proper hermeneutical approach? The first three chapters focus on truth, inspiration, and interpretation.

A second area to be studied involves various "church matters." I would prefer to call them "church issues" but the topics I address are not the things we usually categorize as issues. These "church matters" have two things in common: first, they are matters the local church members must address as a group, because second, they are matters that relate to a biblical understanding of what it means to be church, to live in the context of church, and to fulfill the obligations that come to us because we are part of the body of Christ. I will address six specific concerns in six chapters. (1) What is the nature of the church? (2) What is a proper understanding of and attitude toward unity, and what efforts could the church put forth that would develop a workable process resulting in unity? What should be our attitude toward ecumenical movements? What should be our attitude toward opportunities for cooperation in areas of mutual concern such as moral issues? (3) What is the relationship of the church to the world? (4) What is

the nature of Christian experience? This aspect of the study will require that we think clearly and restudy biblically such subjects as worship, gender roles, the value of human beings (including racial and ethnic matters), the nature of our fellowship, and biblical methods for resolving differences. We must attempt to understand the impact of culture in these areas while maintaining a biblical stance. (5) What is the nature of the Christian mission? In a time when mission work has largely been hijacked in too many churches, how does one balance the need to be compassionate and the mandate to take the gospel to the world? (6) What is the nature of Christian hope? Set in the larger context and conversation of the contemporary church, what is the shape of a biblical eschatology and understanding of the last times?

A third general area of concern is in the matter of Bible applications which will result in spiritual, disciplined, Christ-like lifestyles. Numerous questions can be raised, but three specific questions will be addressed in the final two articles in the series: (1) What is the nature of the human being? (2) How can I experience the transformed life to be more like Jesus? (3) What is the nature of my fellowship and sharing with other Christians?

Such subjects do indeed represent challenges to the church. We must prayerfully and carefully seek God's knowledge and wisdom while making applications that will help us define and redefine our Christian thinking and attitudes. How we think, what we think about, our priorities, our will, and our decisions must reflect in our hearts as the body of Christ on earth the heart of Jesus.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: Truth and Scripture***

First things first. Making sure that the underlying principles are in place is a first essential step to establishing a firm foundation for faith. The church must wrestle with and understand the Bible – its nature, origin, reliability, inspiration and interpretation. The church must clearly understand why and how Scripture is the communication of God's truth. We as Christians must increase our Bible knowledge. Lack of Bible knowledge among Christians has not changed; concern about biblical ignorance has not lessened. In our post-modern world, we must not only know what the Bible says, we must be prepared to ask hard questions and wrestle with the nature of truth, the nature of Scripture, and the relationship of Scripture to human thought.

Extremes exist at either end of a polarity. Fundamental religious thinkers of previous times (and of our own contemporary time) often gave the impression that they distrusted scholarship, including the scientific disciplines. Some tended toward an anti-intellectualism, perhaps even desiring or valuing ignorance. At the other extreme was an unthinking acceptance of science and reason, often to the exclusion of God and his Word. Is not all truth God's truth? Are not our minds created by God and given to us by God, a vital part of the divine image we bear? How shall we understand human reason? Is God insulted when we refuse to think? Do we not honor God most fully when we "think God's thoughts after him," as Johann Kepler stated it? The church must consider truth wherever it is found and integrate all truth into an understanding of God, our world, and ourselves. The Bible is truth. Let us not be confused or concerned to learn that every little piece of truth about every detail of the physical realm is not found in Scripture. The Bible is not a science book.

Ultimately, we must deal with the relationship of reason to truth (and thus, to Scripture). Since the Enlightenment, reason has generally been considered supreme in Western thought. (Prior to that,

as a general summary, the Catholic church claimed to stand over Scripture as the sole interpreter of Scripture.) Does truth stand over reason or does reason stand over truth? Which is primary? Which directs the other? Only if Scripture stands supreme above human thought, every human device, and even the church, is the possibility of objective truth affirmed. Objective truth exists – truth that is objectively true whether you and I accept it, affirm it, or can grasp it.

Our post-modern world does not accept the view of truth set forth in the previous paragraph. In our world of tolerance, truth is most often seen as subjective. Your truth and my truth may not be the same. Modern thought says that something may be true for you but not for me. In this kind of culture, the culture that surrounds us and assaults us and our children on every hand, we must stand firmly in affirming not only the possibility but the existence of objective truth. Truth exists, objective truth exists, whether I accept it, affirm it, or grasp it. The church must speak thoughtfully but vociferously, setting forth the possibility, probability, and demonstrable reality that the God of Scripture is the God of objective truth.

Some of the contemporary cultural problem with truth has come because religion has been moved from the public to the private arena. Religion has been pushed to the fringes in our society. The privatization of religion increases subjectivity. The very nature of truth demands that it be identified and proved in the public arena. Toward this end, the pushing of religion to the periphery of life has contributed to the rejection of objective truth. The church must actively support and encourage the return of religion to the public arena.

I conclude this chapter with a quick look at some truths about truth. When we recognize these aspects of truth, we are better prepared to affirm the existence of objective truth, and that the Bible presents God's truth. (1) Some things are true as a result of definitions. A circle is round (and cannot not be round) by mathematical definition. (2) One must distinguish definitions and hypotheses. A hypothesis is often accepted as true until the evidence is available to prove that it is false (not true). (3) Truth

is discovered, not invented. Truth exists independent of human knowledge of it. For example, gravity existed prior to Newton. (4) Truth is objective, not subjective. Objective truth exists, even if no one recognizes it. (5) That objective truth exists means that it is impossible for two people to have two different and conflicting truth claims. It is impossible to say “that is true for you but not for me,” or “that is true for me but not for you.” (6) Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people in all places at all times. (7) Truth is unchanging even though human beliefs about truth change. When people began to believe the earth was round and not flat, the truth about the earth did not change, only the belief changed. (8) Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely those beliefs. (9) Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it. An arrogant person does not make the truth he professes false. (10) All truths are absolute truths. Some truths that appear to be relative are really absolute. For example, “I, Bob, felt hot on September 5, 2019 after mowing the lawn” may appear to be a relative truth, but it is actually absolutely true for everyone, everywhere that I experienced the sensation of heat on that day. (11) Contrary beliefs are possible but contrary truths are not possible. We can believe everything is true (although we would be mistaken; the statement cannot be true because opposites exclude each other), but we cannot make everything true. (12) In summary, every truth claim is exclusive – it excludes its opposite. To say that God’s truth exists, is important, and will be taught excludes the opposites – that God’s truth does not exist, is not important, and will not be taught, and vice versa.

The Bible is God’s communication of truth about Himself, the world, and human being.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Inspiration of Scripture***

Here is a look back at some of what we have said. The church must understand the Bible. Christians must increase in Bible knowledge. Biblical ignorance is a great challenge that continues trouble the church. In this post-modern world, Christians must not only know what the Bible says – Christians must be ready to ask and answer difficult questions about the nature of truth, the nature of Scripture, and the relationship of Scripture to human thought.

Of equal importance, the church must understand and be able to explain biblical inspiration. Extremes exist at either end of the spectrum. Some religious dictionaries say that fundamentalists believe "every word of the Bible is literally true." At the other extreme, some seem to think none of the Bible is really true in a literal sense. At least two things must be considered under the general topic of biblical inspiration – the literalness of the Bible and the process of inspiration.

How do we accept the Bible as true while properly distinguishing literal and figurative language? Some are tempted to the ditch of over-literalism. Others are tempted to the ditch of cultural and human reinterpretation and application so that virtually all of the Bible becomes figurative. The church affirms this: that all that the Bible affirms is true, and that even what is affirmed figuratively or poetically (rather than literally) is still true and must be interpreted as such.

Second, the process of inspiration must also be examined and understood. Conservatives have tended to regard inspiration as a somewhat mechanical, dictated process in which human authors are basically passive with no active role – word for word, literal inspiration. The idea that inspiration is verbal and plenary has been difficult for some to reconcile with any other method of inspiration. Did God dictate the Bible in a way similar to the

Muslim view of the Koran (dictated by Allah in Arabic through the angel Gabriel, with Muhammad's only contribution being to take down the dictation)? This view of inspiration results in a Koran that is believed to be an exact reproduction of the heavenly original.

How shall we explain the dual authorship of Scripture, that the words of God are communicated in the words of human beings? How can we explain the involvement and roles of human authors or redactors, especially when their own vocabulary and personal writing styles are clearly in view? We conclude that the divine author spoke through human authors in full possession of their faculties, even if we do not fully understand the process by which God did it.

Finally, what must we understand regarding the accuracy of our current versions or translations to avoid compromising the authority of Scripture? In what way is God's Scripture authoritative? What makes it so? The church must firmly address these and similar questions to understand the nature of the "God-breathed" revelation in Scripture.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Interpretation of Scripture***

Because we are involved in a process of developing a system of understanding to establish fundamentals, a brief review will be helpful. What has been said? In asking how the Christian community must understand the nature of Scripture, three areas are basic – Bible knowledge that focuses on understanding God’s truth, Bible inspiration, and Bible interpretation. The church, or better, every individual Christian, must understand the Bible. Christians must continually seek to increase their Bible knowledge. In our post-modern world, we must not only know what the Bible says, we must be ready to ask questions, study, learn, and defend the nature of truth, the nature of Scripture, and the relationship of Scripture to human thought. Second, the church must understand biblical inspiration.

A third challenge, still related to how the church should understand and use the Bible, concerns biblical interpretation. As noted in the previous studies, extremes exist at either end of a polarity. The tendency is either to overemphasize what the text meant in the first century with virtually no application in the contemporary world, or to overemphasize what the text means today so that the original intent and message of the author is all but lost.

Some are afraid of the word interpretation, thinking that any interpretation becomes a merely human endeavor. When Jesus used a word – for instance, *rabbi*, and said that the word “being interpreted” is *teacher* – he was merely translating. In fact, the Greek word *hermeneuo* can be translated as “to translate.” My point is to show that even though the process of literary and grammatical analysis of a text so that it is understood may be a human process, that does mean that it is an impossible process.

Literature can be understood precisely because there are interpretive (hermeneutical) rules. In the same way, the Bible can be interpreted and understood. Let us not let a small quantity of difficult texts cloud our thinking so that we conclude that God's truth no longer exists or that God's truth can never be understood by human beings.

The temptation of the Restoration heritage (of which I am a part) has generally been to suppose that we can apply the biblical text directly to our lives and our situations as if it had been written primarily for us. Such too easily ignores the cultural chasm between the biblical world and the contemporary world. How does one reconcile "what it meant" with "what it means"? How and where do the "then" and "now" meet? How does one honor the intent, purpose, and message of the original author while making appropriate applications in the contemporary world? We must continually struggle with the task of cultural transposition, identifying the essential message of the text, detaching it from its original cultural context while retaining the essential elements of the message, and then applying it in our own present situation.

In the process of biblical interpretation, the church will be helped by remembering the history of the hermeneutic struggle – the struggle between literal interpretation and allegorical interpretation goes back to the early centuries of Christianity. The church must understand that the "New Hermeneutic," as originally conceived, is about 100 years old. With an old phrase experiencing constant revivification so that it is being applied to a wide variety of interpretive models, one must avoid pointing fingers and tossing accusations carelessly. Unfortunately, some use the phrase "new hermeneutic" to apply to any interpretive model they do not understand or accept. Some, for lack of understanding, would even call Paul's model a "new hermeneutic." The church must ensure that Scripture stands over and evaluates culture, not the reverse. Culture never takes precedence over Scripture. In the process of interpreting and applying Scripture, the first consideration is not what the culture wants, demands, or needs, but what is the essence of the message from God.

The church must renew its efforts to read and know the Scriptures so that we can more easily read, interpret, understand, and apply the message of Scripture accurately in our world.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Nature of the Church***

The first three articles addressed concerns in the general area of Bible knowledge. If the observation that Bible knowledge, or more accurately, the lack of Bible knowledge, was one of great issues of 1990s, is true, then the church in the new millennium must address at least three essential understandings: (1) what is the nature of the Bible, that is, the nature of truth and the relationship between biblical truth and human thought, (2) biblical inspiration, and (3) biblical interpretation. The challenges that are continually presented to the church in these three areas were the subject of the first three chapters.

Another set of issues relate to the church. Six specific concerns or question sets were previously suggested. (1) What is the nature of the church? (2) What is a proper attitude toward unity, and what is a workable process that will result in unity? What should be our attitude toward ecumenical movements? What should be our attitude toward opportunities for cooperation in areas of mutual concern such as moral issues? (3) What is the relationship of the church to the world? (4) What is the nature of Christian experience? Answering this question will require that we think clearly and restudy biblically such subjects as worship, gender roles, the value of human beings (including racial and ethnic matters), the nature of our fellowship, and biblical methods for resolving differences. We must attempt to understand the impact of culture in these areas while maintaining a firmly biblical stance. (5) What is the nature and identity of the Christian mission? (6) What is the nature of Christian hope, that is, what is a biblical eschatology and understanding of the last times? These things the church must address corporately in an attempt to reach a shared understanding of basic issues that threaten to divide God's people. These six topics are the subject of the next six chapters.

What is the nature of the church? What is the nature of the fellowship shared in the church? What does it mean to be *koinonia*? Again, two extremes exist on the polarity. At one pole, especially in view of the nature of today's society, it is easy and tempting to hold a separatist ecclesiology and to withdraw from any community, people, or individual person who does not agree in every particular with our own doctrinal position. At the other pole are those who conclude that every person who claims to be a follower of Jesus must be accepted in the church, regardless of beliefs. The importance of the first three studies becomes clear. Navigating a path between the two polarities requires wrestling with the nature of truth as it relates to God's Word, and the inspiration and interpretation of that Word.

Is it possible to maintain the doctrinal (and ethical) purity of the church while questioning whether perfect agreement can be attained in this world? Is no truth knowable with certainty? If correct thinking cannot be discerned, how can one discern correct actions? A necessary conclusion is that God has revealed truth to his human creation and that he intends that his people know, believe, and practice it.

But if in some matter, doctrinal agreement is humanly impossible, what should be my attitude toward someone who acts incorrectly, or toward someone who thinks incorrectly (according to my understanding)? And what of those matters that are the result of reasonings, not properly doctrine (Romans 14-15)? The balance between discipline and tolerance is not easy to find. What should I think about others who are also affirming that they are biblical Christians? Is the grace of God sufficient to cover mis-thoughts as well as missteps? At what point is a person's relationship to Christ, and thus to the church as the body of Christ, severed? We certainly cannot afford to sever relationships more quickly than would Christ himself, nor do we desire to maintain that which he would not maintain. These are not easy questions; they will not be satisfactorily addressed with standard answers. Addressing this question will require our best minds and our best hearts as we interact and study together.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Unity of the Church***

What is the nature of Christian unity? Can Christian unity ever become a reality or must it always remain only theoretical? What level of cooperation and interaction is necessary to affirm that unity exists? Is unity primarily doctrinal? Is unity primarily practical? What is a proper attitude toward ecumenical or cooperative movements or efforts? Such are difficult questions, and others equally challenging should be raised.

How should one understand the relationship between individual local congregations? Are they to be autonomous, independent, or interdependent? Or some combination? How do relationships of dependency or codependency – especially in congregational relationship on the mission field – encourage or hinder unity?

Historically, the more conservative elements among the churches have generally issued a blanket, uncritical, even vociferous rejection of ecumenicism. The claim is that ecumenicism as it is generally practiced in our contemporary world is merely "agreeing to disagree"? In such a context, how can we, if at all, be discerning, affirming the biblical foundations of genuine ecumenicism? For those who share my religious heritage, we must recall that one of the foundational pillars of the American Restoration Movement was unity. Can we affirm the good in an effort while continuing to claim the freedom to reject what is not within the scope of biblical authority? Such has been most difficult in our heritage, especially so in the waning days of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century. One can only hope that we will creatively rethink what the faith requires in this area as we forge a future.

Although they are two separate issues, to raise questions about ecumenicism also raises questions concerning cooperation

within the Christian community. How, if at all, shall we be involved with the larger Christian community in our struggle with moral and ethical issues such as abortion, pornography, etc. How might we be involved with the larger Christian community in promoting Christian values and principles for the home, marriages, families, and society? What shall we say about involvement in loose alliances of ministers in a local community, those who in coming together from time to time at least introduce the possibility of dialogue? What about involvement in various activities with others who do not share the specific parameters of our faith, e.g. abortion rallies or combined efforts to oppose pornography or other immorality?

The Restoration Movement had as its two great pillars in its early days a dream for the return for Scripture and a dream for the unity of believers. Some say that history shows that the two are mutually exclusive. Do we in the church still believe these are simultaneously possible? Have we given up on the dream? Must a Christian choose one or the other – either the Bible or unity? Can we have allegiance and loyalty to God and his word and to God's plan for the unity of his people at the same time?

Simplistic answers are easy and abound on every front. Who will think seriously about our dilemma and help us find our way through the jungle of contemporary religion, so we can fulfill Jesus' prayer in John 17? Will we? Can we?

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: Relationship Between the Church and the World***

Again, it is helpful to think about where we have come from. Five chapters have preceded this one (plus an introduction). The first three chapters addressed the nature of the Bible, biblical inspiration, and biblical interpretation. The next two articles introduced "church" matters – the nature of the church and the unity of the church. A third concern that must be addressed is the relationship of the church to the world.

Perhaps more than at any time in recent history, the church and individual members of the church have found a tremendous difficulty in the challenge to think properly about this world. Illustrating the challenge, at times those groups which have tended most strongly toward fundamentalism have most easily assimilated the world's values and standards uncritically; at other times such groups have stood aloof and distanced, fearing contamination. How does one determine which is the appropriate response at any given point in time? While Christians want to heed the biblical injunction not to conform to this world, at the same time Christians are anxious to respond to the call of Jesus to penetrate the world, to be salt and light, in order to slow and perhaps even stop the decay and to illuminate its darkness.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the need to be in the world while not being of the world. The basic problem, the difficulty that arises with the too-ready involvement of the church with the world, is the adoption of a world-driven worldview. What is your perspective? How do you look at things? At least two possible answers exist – a secular worldview and a God-informed worldview. Which worldview do I have? What is the difference between the two options? How do I know where I am?

Until we come face to face with God's desire to fashion within the church a people who are like him, possessed by him, and guided by him, we will continue to marvel at the inroads the world makes into our lives and we will remain generally powerless to do anything about it since we do not understand how and why it is happening.

The renewed call to discipleship that is resounding through many of the churches at the beginning of the decade of the 20s is a hopeful sign. I applaud the movement to decentralize and deinstitutionalize the church so that its power is returned to the common people – facilitating the development of a people who are committed to living under the lordship of Jesus Christ and who are committed to discipleship, both in their own lives and in helping others learn to trust and follow Jesus wholeheartedly. For too long evangelism has not been coupled with discipleship. The fundamental task is twofold – God is concerned with saving people and with keeping people saved. If evangelism means sharing the message of salvation, discipleship involves training Christ-followers so they will be faithful followers and disciples who make more disciples.

Perhaps the importance of clearly establishing the place of the church in its relationship with the world is nowhere more visible than in the mission of the church. The church is called together by the Good News in order to be sent out with the Good News. The missional nature of the church means that the church can never be satisfied with being in the world to meet physical needs, the church must ever reflect its separation from the world by meeting spiritual needs.

Talking about the dangers and threats posed by the world may be an area where we know better than we do. The church must restore in the days ahead the prophetic voice that calls light light and dark dark. It is time to restore the faith that countenances no wishy-washy middle ground in the realm of lifestyle and morality. I want to be sympathetic to those whose lives are wrecked by the evil which they could not see and did not know. God may not

be as sympathetic to those of us who sin "with our eyes wide open" and seek forgiveness without making necessary changes in our lives so that God is able to work within us and through us to keep sin at bay.

I do not have all the answers, but I know without doubt that the church must think clearly about the relationship between the church and the world, and more specifically about the relationship of individual Christians to the world. Even though the church must be in the world, it does not follow that the world must be in the church!

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Nature of the Christian Experience***

By way of review, the previous six chapters have addressed three major challenges facing the church in the new millennium in the area of Bible knowledge (the nature of the Bible and the nature of truth, biblical inspiration, and biblical interpretation) and three major concerns in how the church understands itself (the nature of the church, the unity of the church, and the relationship of the church to the world).

In this chapter, I introduce three practical concerns the church must address if it is to have a viable voice in our world. These have to do with the nature of the Christian experience, the identification of the Christian mission, and the nature of the Christian hope. Under the umbrella of the Christian experience are many of the "issues" that trouble the church in the contemporary world. Defining the Christian experience biblically demands that one ask about worship, gender roles, and the value of human beings (which includes both a theoretical and practical understanding and practice in ethnic and racial issues). In this brief overview, I can only mention the need to address these concerns and suggest some basic beginning points.

In the practice and experience of the church, we must somehow find healthy ways in which we can worship together, support one another, encourage one another, to become in our own day the redemptive and redeemed body of believers that is described in the New Testament. This challenge calls us to address the nature of New Testament worship. Casting aside for the moment the matter of the use or non-use of instrumental music (a relatively recent innovation on the church scene), we must analyze the use of dialogue, drama and other sensory presentations which appeal to the empirical or physical senses as much as or more than to the spiritual person. We must learn to evaluate visual

representations, distinguishing idolatry and icons. Such are not easy issues and much potential for differing viewpoints exists. We must ask how the genuine *ekklesia* (assembly or community) of God might be expected to solve a variety of divisive issues. What does it mean to speak of the shared Christian experience in the context of our present culture in questions related to an understanding of gender and ethnic issues?

Beyond the concerns which are related to and arise in Christian worship, one must ask more broadly how the New Testament message is to be understood in today's world with regard to human dignity, slavery, ethnic issues, social justice and freedom, and social oppression. Is the biblical message so out of step with the world's view today that the church must remain distinct and isolationist in some matters, or does the biblical message suggest principles that may be applied both in the church and in the world to improve gender and ethnic relationships by demonstrating that the genuine answers to these concerns is in the message of the Messiah who came to declare liberty for all?

As in the previous subjects raised in this brief treatment, such questions are not easy topics. In fact, these may be some of the most difficult of all. Answers will require our best thinking and reflection, coupled with a renewed commitment to knowing and understanding the message of Jesus Christ. I pray we will have the heart and good sense to commit ourselves to the task.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: Identifying the Christian Mission***

In order to be effective in today's unchristian world, the church must address several practical matters related to the mission of the church. These matters must be addressed biblically, integrating the message of Scripture with appropriate actions in today's world. Among the matters to be addressed are those mentioned in the previous article – worship, gender roles, and ethnic and racial attitudes. These aspects of the Christian experience, improperly understood, can quickly ruin the mission of the church. The church must also ask anew about the way the Bible describes the nature of the Christian mission. Toward the right end of the theological spectrum, from the viewpoint of conservatism or fundamentalism, the tendency is to understand the Christian mission almost exclusively in terms of evangelism. The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel. Genuine missionary activity is overtly evangelistic. Such attitudes are often in reaction to the "social gospel" and questions about the value and effectiveness of the various benevolent and educational endeavors which are undertaken under the guise of mission work, often with little or no accompanying effort to meet spiritual needs. The conflict is especially obvious in many conservative churches – one thing is affirmed and another practiced.

We must ask whether it is possible to continue to affirm the priority of evangelism while at the same time feeling the need to shoulder the burden of the social ills of the world, refusing to lay aside or distance ourselves from our social responsibilities. If Jesus came into this world with mighty words and mighty works, both proclaiming and demonstrating, described by Matthew as "preaching, teaching, and healing," do not good news and good works supplement and reinforce one another? To separate them is as Carl Henry has described it "an embarrassing divorce."

In the need to reidentify its mission, the church must find the healthy marriage that integrates our abilities to help address physical concerns with our intense desire to address spiritual concerns. We must find the "both-and" that will effectively eliminate the "either-or" option. We must not become so enamored with the need for compassionate love that we forget that the ultimate expression of love demands addressing spiritual needs, thus addressing the needs of the whole person. If Jesus is our example, we have no option but do both. We must speak the truth in love, we must minister in love. Both dynamics are clearly visible in the early church as described in the Bible, and both must characterize our understanding and practice of the Christian mission today.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Nature of Christian Hope***

The final area to be addressed under the general topic of the Christian experience is the nature of Christian hope. This brief overview of the priorities the church must reclaim in order to develop a clear vision which is consistent with God's vision for the church does not allow a thorough examination of the various topics. And it is also recognized that a number of other concerns could be suggested as priorities.

The items included here seemed paramount to this writer as we entered the new millennium, and the need for the church to address these topics remains two decades later – most likely most of these present a bigger challenge today than was the case 20 years ago. In this chapter, to the previously addressed questions of worship, gender, race, and the Christian mission, I add the question of the identity and nature of Christian hope. This brief treatment cannot answer, nor even raise, every important and difficult issue in the arena of eschatology, but perhaps some suggestions concerning the nature of the contemporary dilemma and where one might begin one's study will be helpful in providing guidance.

What is the Christian hope? Conservatives have generally tended to dogmatize the future, although they hold no monopoly on dogmatism. Many of our friends and neighbors in the larger community of Christendom would give considerable detail about the fulfillment of prophecy and biblical timetables, and at times we may be tempted to join the fray. Some understand history through rigid dispensations, espousing a Christian Zionism in support of the modern state of Israel that does injustice to Palestinians politically and does an equal injustice to Jews religiously. My observation of our churches suggests that such understandings are more broadly held than one might imagine. The church must study and restudy God's plan for his people and seriously

address the questions of millennialism and Zionism. What do the Old Testament prophecies say about the future of Israel, including the state of Israel? What is a proper understanding in these matters according to the Bible?

More recently, numerous eschatological questions have been raised about the future of planet earth, God's methods of dealing with his human creation when time is no more, and various related topics. Some of the discussions of these matters are theologically deep. Often, the Bible does not speak as clearly as some would have us believe.

Is it possible to affirm with eager expectation the personal, visible, glorious and triumphant return of the Lord Jesus Christ while simultaneously affirming our own ignorance about some of the details on which even firmly biblical Christians have differing viewpoints? I believe it is, but such will require our best thinking, not only about last things and biblical prophecy, but also about the biblical admonitions concerning fellowship and our love for one another.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: The Human Nature and the Divine Nature***

Having addressed three concerns in the general area of Bible knowledge (the nature of Scripture, biblical inspiration, and biblical interpretation), three matters in the church's self-understanding (the nature of the church, the nature of unity, and the relationship of the church to the world), and three matters in the arena of Christian practice (Christian experience, Christian mission, and Christian hope), we come to two significant questions of application – what should we do to overcome our human nature? how can we live the Christian life in a way that reflects our shared experiences as participants in God's creation?

What is the nature of the human being? Is our human nature something that stands in the way of our service to God, thus, something to be overcome in order to be a Christian? How can it be that we are both image of God (divine nature) and living beings (human nature)? What do these two affirmations, that we are both human beings and image of God beings, say about us? And a related concern, what is the nature of the fellowship that we share with other Christians? While these and similar questions may technically belong under the general heading of "church," I have separated them for two reasons. First, they provide a fitting conclusion to the series as we ask about the overall implications of these studies for our Christian lives. Second, they are matters which every Christian must address individually. Some agreement exists that one aspect of our integrated divine-human nature is that we as human beings created in God's image have the ability to think and reason, and even more, that we can reason abstractly about things that do not exist. This mental capacity for thought must help define our responsibility.

The church corporately desires the inclusion and involvement of all people, based on an understanding of its nature, character, unity, worship, identity, mission, and shared hope. On another level, however, each Christian must ask and answer the same

questions personally. All of us must ask how we are involved in the lives of others, how we become the presence of Jesus for others, how we are his hands and feet.

The answers given to these three questions may reflect the greatest challenge facing the church. If for each individual Christian the faith and practice of the incarnation of Christ are not to be based in knowledge, where is the guidance to help us understand how we should live? We must continually reevaluate our thinking – what we think and how that thinking grows out of our knowledge of Christ and his word (which knowledge must rest firmly on accurate understanding). How we think, what we think about, our priorities, our will, and our decisions are vital. The church must rethink and restudy the thought processes which characterize us and ask anew about the nature of Christian thought. We must understand the nature of the Christian mind (often in the New Testament referred to as the heart), while not limiting the place of relationships based on emotion, desire, will, and choices.

## ***Developing 2020 Vision: What Does It Mean to Live as a Christian?***

We come to the end of this series of short studies. When all is said and done, my primary goal is that the Bible will be understood as the authoritative, inspired Word of God, with a message that is easily understood and plainly in view for our lives today. In God's eternal wisdom, the divine, inspired word of God has been communicated to us in human words so that we can understand. Inspired human beings were used by God to give us an understandable word. Understanding the word of God is not mysterious and is not beyond us, even though we encounter a few biblical passages that are difficult to understand. Another of my goals is that the church will develop a healthy, biblical self-understanding, that is, that the church will carefully think about itself in the broader context of the world, seeking genuineness, desiring to be like Jesus, seeking the unity for which Jesus prayed. Also, I hope that the church's reexamination of the biblical imperatives for relationship with God and relationship with others will serve to define biblically the Christian mission and the eternal saving purpose of God on which the Christian hope depends. When each Christian has rethought the challenge of spiritual living in the human sphere and has adjusted priorities and choices to reflect our higher calling and higher nature, the final question – a question that summarizes the series – is this: How can I become more like Jesus? What changes are necessary in my life? What adjustments are needed?

Until each Christian discovers and begins to live out a commitment to Christ that grows out of genuine relationship, it will be difficult for the church to address effectively such matters as personal worship and the devotional life, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and a host of other issues such as discipleship, lifestyle, and purity.

The nature of our fellowship, the lives we share with other Christians, in these are the power and support for authentic Christian living. In biblical *koinonia* (fellowship) we become involved in the lives of others, we become the presence of Jesus for others, we are his hands and feet.

Such is indeed a great challenge for the church and for each Christian who seeks an authentic Christian life. What do we need to study? What do we need to rethink? What do we need to know? What do we need to do? These questions will provide beginning points as we look forward to the year 2020 and seek to develop a 20/20 vision of God's plan.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Bob Young is the founder of **Latin American Leadership Development**, a ministry that provides resources for ministry and mission ([www.bobyongresources.com](http://www.bobyongresources.com)). Written materials, books, and videos for personal study, church Bible classes, and home studies are available. Dr. Young travels extensively and speaks frequently at local church events, and in regional and national conferences across Latin America and the United States.

He has authored more than 25 books. His most recent books are the first five volumes in a series of Bible Study Guides (*Early Letters, Prison Letters, Pastoral Letters, Hebrews, and General Letters*). He has also authored a book in Spanish (*Evangelismo: Energizando y Equipando a la Iglesia*, translation: *Evangelism: Energizing and Equipping the Church*).

In his role as a university professor, he authored five books (*Biblical Perspectives for the Adult Learner, Integration of Biblical Principles for the Adult Learner, Life Applications of Biblical Values for the Adult Learner, Supplement to MLA 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, and *Handbook to the Practicum Experience at Ohio Valley College*.)

While ministering in local churches, he wrote six books (*Authentic Living in a Shadowy World: Studies in James; Expectant and Encouraged: Confident That Christ Is Coming Again; Vertical Wisdom for Horizontal Living: Studies in Proverbs; Spiritual Living in a Secular World: Studies in 1 Thessalonians; Developing Spiritual Maturity: Studies in 1 Corinthians; and The Major Prophets: A Study of God's Men*).

He served on the editorial committee and contributed a chapter to a festschrift in honor of Dr. Howard Norton, *A Handbook on Leadership: As Exemplified in the Life of Howard Norton*.

Four shorter e-books are available in online editions (*An Easy Model for Doing Bible Exegesis; Moving from the Text to the Sermon; Financial Principles for Life*, co-authored with Jan Young; and *Developing a Planning Model for the Smaller Church*). He e-published three Spanish books that are available online (*Leer la Biblia Teológicamente: Introducción a la Teología; La Exegesis Hecha Sencilla; and Desde El Texto al Sermón*).

While teaching in the Christian Academy, he authored *Time Travelers*, a Bible survey book for teens. He served as co-translator for an eight-lesson series of evangelistic Bible Studies (*Quest for Truth, En Pos de la Verdad*), and authored two additional lessons for the Spanish series.

After a career spanning 25 years of preaching ministry and 12 years in Christian higher education, Dr. Young retired in 2007 to devote his time to strengthening and empowering churches. For the last 10 years, he has traveled extensively in Latin America teaching Bible seminars and providing training for evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, and church planting.