

The Church's **mission** is to: "to glorify God by providing a **Scriptural environment** that **nurtures -and- equips** the saints to impact our community and world, by being God intends His church to be, through submission the authority of Scripture, and confirmed by a Scriptural world view and integration of Biblical principles into life."

A. By: 'mission' -- we mean the general approaches to action, that will result in the vision being realized. Mission, in time, precedes vision, but without vision, it is empty and incomplete; therefore vision must be a prerequisite (in principle). ¹ To be on mission means that our energies, plans, and procedures are purpose drive, not just habitual and rote memory. Further, to be on mission means that while we may use the programs and methods of other churches, but only in so far as -and- as long as they assist us in realizing our purpose. Somewhere I read: "Ministry by mimicry invariably results in deterioration, rather than growth". Ministry by mimicry is a mockery -- it has been termed: 'nothing more than rearranging the chairs on the sinking Titanic!

B. By: 'Scripturally authorized' -- we mean that the criteria for methods, as well as goals in ministry, is the Bible. This means the following:

1) **The guide and assessment for ministry:** is the Bible, not human wisdom (2 Tim. 4:14-17). Now, there is much the Bible does not dictate. For example the Bible does not mandate how frequently believers should meet together, nor does it demand when and where believers are to meet, nor does it mandate the kinds of meetings. We are not locked into a certain pattern. In these areas there is freedom and liberty, as well as the opportunity to exercise wisdom and take the initiative to develop the mission of the local

¹ George Barna, The Power Of Vision, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 46-47.

church, in a way that most effectively edifies the families in the church, as well as evangelizes the people in the community. Gene Getz arrests our attention with: “As you study the book of Acts and the history of the early church in the epistles, you will find a slow evolution, where the focus shifts from activities to directives, where the emphasis moves from results to objectives”.²

2) ***The source of ministry is:*** God, not human activity (Jn. 15:5). Activity does not necessarily equate nor guarantee ministry. Scriptural ministry may not necessarily mean church activity; sometimes there is much activity, and little ministry. At other times in ministry, activity may be minimal, while ministry may be intense. Because activity may actually be a detour from, a substitute for, and a hurdle to ministry, we must humbly submit ourselves and our programs to analyze if we have God directed ministry or human directed activity.

B. By: ‘Scripturally prioritized’ -- we mean that ministry must be always ask: What are our Scriptural objectives and goals? our Scriptural purposes and priorities? A study of the New Testament confirms the following:

1) ***The focus of ministry is:*** people, not just programs (1 Thess. 2:8). Someone described church activity with this: “The church is like a basketball game, where the team runs back and forth across the court and exhausts itself in the game -- but, nothing of eternal importance happens, other than physical exhaustion and mental fatigue”! Are we using our people to build programs, or are programs subservient to build our people? If the ministry is about people, may we evaluate and without anxiety or anguish, axe any and all programs, not effectively transforming lives to integrate the Bible into life? If programs are only tools, are

² Gene Getz, Sharpening The Focus Of The Church, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 52.

we at liberty to evaluate and replace any program, with a more effective approach to ministry?

2) ***The goal of ministry is:*** mature believers, not just converts (Col. 1:28-29). Success cannot be measured by attendance and activity, but rather by ‘renewed minds’ (Rom. 12:1-2). We are too concerned about the breadth of activity, and too little concerned about the depth of ministry -- but ministry results in spiritual reproduction (or multiplication), not just additions (2 Tim. 2:2). To accomplish this goal, we must realize that in ministry, function must take precedence over form; and principles take priority over procedure. The issue is not ‘how’ we do, but rather, ‘what’ we do!

C. *By: ‘environment’* -- we mean that if our people are to integrate the Word of God into life, the church must become a congregation and not just an audience -- the church must ‘be’ the church, not just ‘attend’ the church. In methodology and procedure, we must train ourselves to expect and be accountable for application of truth to life.

To shift from listening to applying the Bible is a difficult change. It would be wise for us to hear the words of Dr. Howard Hendricks, given at a conference on discipleship some years ago, where he stated: “We must distinguish between the changeable and the unchangeable”.

Frank Tillapaugh in *‘The Church Unleashed’*, reminds us of the rut into which we have fallen, writing: “One of the saddest commentaries on the evangelical church is its deadening sameness. When Detroit mass produces, all the models come off the assembly line exactly alike. But, what the Holy Spirit creates is always unique. Yes, there are similarities between snowflakes, and you can expect some similarity between evangelical churches, but not

the monotonous sameness, which suffocates stifles, and kills! Churches in that rut have chosen to die, rather than live, because only in death is there no change.”³

Willingness to change risk new methods and sacrifice programs in order to achieve Biblical goals and objectives -- to be purpose driven -- is, indeed, the challenge of the modern church. The slowness of the church to respond to the change, however, is nothing new. As we read the book of Acts, we see the church in Acts 6-15 agonizing and struggling over what to do about and with ‘half-breed Samaritans’ and the ‘full-blooded Gentile dogs’!

D. By: ‘nurtures and equips’ -- we mean the effect of the programs, the schedule, the services, the opportunities, the messages -- in short, the influences brought to bear on the lives of the congregation -- is that we have encouraged, inspired, taught, trained, mentored, and disciplined them to ‘be perfected’.

The Church’s mission of “providing a Scriptural environment that nurtures and equips the saints to impact our community and world...” forces upon us certain Scriptural objectives as our ultimate aim for our congregation, namely each believer comes to: (aa) maturity; (bb) ministry; (cc) edify; (dd) harmony; (ee) integrity; (ff) stability; and, (gg) charity. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

A By: ‘Scriptural objectives’ -- we mean that the church (meaning the congregation) has suffered too much from the misdirection of energies, the unwise use of time, and the ill-advised use of resources. No one wants to climb the ladder of success only to find it leaning against the wrong wall; and yet, this is exactly what has happened to too many pastors and church leaders.

³ Frank R. Tillapaugh, The Church Unleashed, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1982), 73.

Recognizing that we have limited resources and time deadlines is necessary to achieve our purpose. Further, focusing on our ultimate objective is critical to the proper stewardship of those resources.

B. By: ‘maturity’ -- we do not just mean a question of time. As one has said: “Age tells how long you have been on the road of life, not how far you have traveled”! In spiritual maturity, we find a fullness of Christlikeness in motivation, attitude, and character. While we may argue that we are never totally Christlike in this lifetime, the passion and pursuit of Christlikeness is always characteristic of the mature believer.

Only in mature believers do we see servanthood and meeting of the needs of others (‘ministry’) , spiritual harmony (‘unity’), teaching, training, and discipling of the body of Christ (‘edify’), and evangelism (‘speaking the truth in love’)! The Bible clearly presents four ingredients in the maturing (‘perfecting’) of the saints, three of which are outside the realm of authority of the church, but they include:

1) The ‘agent’ of maturity and perfection -- the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

2) The ‘tool’ of maturity and perfection -- the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16).

3) The ‘opportunity’ for maturity and perfection -- trials (Jas. 1:2-4).

4) The ‘apex’ for maturity and perfection -- suffering (1 Pe. 5:10).

Since in this process, we have no control as to the trials or tests and suffering in life, and since the Holy Spirit’s ministry is independent of our authority, our focus must remain on teaching the Word of God and feeding the souls of men, women, young people, families, (Acts 20:28; 1 Pe. 5:2). As Paul so well stated:

“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28).

C. By: ‘ministry’ -- we mean that when the man of God commits himself to a teaching ministry in the Word (Acts 6:7; 20:32), God gifts, graces, and enables the body to meet the needs that arise, (Rom. 12:5-10; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Pe. 5:10). From the calling of the first deacons in Acts 6, it would behoove us to learn that the church only organizes what the Spirit of God has already started through the hearts of willing people. When maturity is occurring in the people and they are meeting one another’s needs by ministry, the world will begin to see the God-ordained fruits of: unity, integrity, stability, and charity.

Clearly, we must shift the vision of leadership from maintenance to ministry -and- the mission of the congregation from attendance to ministry. Ministry is not management of programs; ministry is not manipulation of people. Ministry has occurred, when people’s needs are met. Sometimes that happens with programs and other times it happens outside programs. Flexibility in programs and firmness in purpose of building principle (the Bible) into people (the Body) is the key to ministry!

D. By: ‘edify’ -- we mean that our objective is not just to raise up followers, but followers, who are training followers behind them. Our objective is not just to raise up disciples, but disciplers, who are leading other disciples behind them. In other words, our goal is never just additions, but multiplication (2 Tim. 2:2) -and- multiplication of leaders and disciplers. Normally, a strong church is not the product of finding and bringing in outside leaders, but rather it is the effect of a church that is focused on its purpose and is developing and multiplying leadership! (Eph. 4:11-16; Tit. 1:5-9)

E. By: ‘harmony’ -- we mean fully and truly, not just officially, visibly and formally in harmony. Some have adopted the idea unity is universalism, seeking to organizationally structure the church over the congregation. Others have adopted the idea that unity is uniformity, seeking to throw away all

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statements of faith, stating doctrine divides. But, in His great high-priestly prayer, our Lord reminds us that the character or nature and the purposes of God are the keys to harmony, (John 17:20-23). Sin and error are the cause of disharmony, and if we are to achieve the Scriptural purpose of God, we must Biblically confront sin in the lives of believers and doctrinal error concerning the Word of God.

F. By: ‘integrity’ -- we mean a life that is not characterized by pretending to others (that is ‘hypocrisy’) or pretending to ourselves, that is dividing life into separate segments (that is ‘duplicity’). Rather, integrity is a life that is whole, not compartmentalized as ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ -- a life that in which our world and His Word (or ‘reality’ and ‘truth’) are brought into harmony. The person of integrity, like the Son, has a single mind: “to do the will of Him that sent Him” (Jn. 4:34) and a single will: “obedience” to the Father’s will (Phil 2:5-11). In short, this is Christlikeness.

As Warren Wiersbe states, “in the modern church we are facing an integrity crisis. Not only is the conduct of the church in question, but so is the very character of the church ... The church is accustomed to hearing people question the message of the gospel, because that message is foolishness to the lost. But, today the situation is embarrassingly reversed, for the messenger is suspect. Both the message and ministry have lost credibility before a watching world”⁴

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, The Integrity Crisis, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 17.

G. By: ‘stability’ -- we mean that individuals and families (1) are not unsettled in their convictions -- “tossed to and fro”, like the waves of the sea, and (2) uncertain of their beliefs -- “carried by every wind of doctrine”. In other words, our goal is to teach and train those who have a firm handle on the truth. No church has effectively ministered to its congregation, if the people are still in a state of spiritual infancy, unfamiliar with the truth, and victimized by false doctrine (Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Cor. 11:3-15) and deceived by every religious charlatan that comes along (2 Cor. 4:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

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H. By: ‘charity’ -- we mean that the believer and the church are characterized by an intense, loving spirit, and a personal commitment to each other. Call it ‘charity’, or ‘loving one another’, or ‘bearing one another’s burdens’ -- but the healthy believer and church is marked by a mood, an atmosphere, an attitude of love for one another. Psychiatrist Karl Meninger is reported to have said that “love is the key to the entire therapeutic program in the psychiatric hospital”!