

A Biblical Philosophy of Ministry: The Non-negotiable Pillars of an Effective Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

If God is to bless our ministry, we need to build that ministry on a platform that is thoroughly biblical.

This seminar is really a “Biblical *Theology* of Ministry,” in which the foundation stones and pillars of a biblical philosophy of ministry.

In pursuing this kind of goal, a number of questions come to mind:

- What should drive a particular ministry?
- Are there different approaches I can take to have an effective ministry?
- How do I determine what I should do?
- How do I develop a ministry that is *biblically* successful?

I. HOW IS PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY DEFINED?

- *What* is a philosophy of ministry?
- *Why* is it so important?

A. First, What Is a *Philosophy* of Ministry?

A philosophy of ministry is a set of *principles* that determines how you will function in your ministry. It is a set of NON-NEGOTIABLE *biblical principles* that guides all the choices and decisions in your ministry.

Simply stated, your philosophy of ministry defines *why* you do what you do.

These principles should be drawn from a careful investigation of

- the *explicit* teaching of Scripture, and
- the *implicit* methods/patterns of ministry in the NT church

B. Second, Why is it so important to have one?

Why is your philosophy (theology) of ministry so crucial?

- It becomes the *why*, which inevitably leads to the *how* of your ministry
 - There is a relationship between the *cause and effect*
 - The kind of *foundation* determines the nature of the *superstructure!*
- Your philosophy will influence every nuance of what you do and how you do it!

II. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY?

A. It provides a *unity* of direction

- Once firmly established, it filters down through the rest of the flock to form a consistent approach to ministry.
 - Your people will do ministry the way you do
 - They will study the way you study
 - They will teach the way you teach
 - They will apply the Word the way you apply the Word
 - Their ministry involvement will be in direct proportion to how well you've communicated your philosophy
- It encourages *consistent* communication of your purpose and overall direction.
 - Creative ideas will always be there, but a philosophy of ministry will provide a consistency of direction and communication.

B. It defines each *part* of your ministry in relation to the *whole*

With a clear philosophy, you can avoid the *complementary vs. competition* trap, as well as *distinction vs. duplication*.

- C. It simplifies *evaluation* of month-to-month and year-to-year goals with an overall biblical understanding of ministry firmly in your mind.

III. WHAT ARE THE FOUNDATION STONES A *BIBLICAL* PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY?

A. IMPROPER but COMMON APPROACHES

- 1. Some start with a Focus on *Programs*.

- a. Try to duplicate a "model program."

→ E.g., "You go to a pastor's conf on the west coast..."

Problem: This can lead to frustration or failure, because the specifics of how God chooses to work in any given situation varies depending upon the nature and needs of the people and the uniqueness of each circumstance.

- b. Stay with an existing program (i.e., we do what we do because we've always done it this way, or because it worked at one time).

Problem: This will lead to frustration or failure because people and their needs constantly change.

- 2. Some start by Focusing on *Needs*

- a. Ask the people what they want.

→ Pastor giving titles of dif sermons and asking people to choose

Problem: When you focus on *felt* needs, you usually end up with a superficial and socially oriented program.

- b. Seek to attract people by pleasing them.

Problem: When you focus on *felt* needs, you end up with a man-centered ministry rather than a God-centered ministry.

3. Some start by Establishing *Goals*

→ Goals are fine—depending on what kind of goals. What are you trying to achieve?

a. Some set goals to achieve “success.”

Problem: When you begin by setting goals, you conform your goals to your view of success, whether right or wrong. This can lead to confusing size with success, i.e., bigger is better.

b. Some set goals based upon incorrect evaluations of the flock.

Problem: When goals are not based upon “real” needs, even though they may be attainable, they will always lead to superficial Christianity.

B. PROPER APPROACH

ANY BIBLICAL MINISTRY MUST HAVE A TRULY BIBLICAL FOUNDATION!

What, then, are the biblical foundation stones?

1. A High View of God

a. God is holy, righteous, and just (and other *perfections*).

b. We must seek to express His communicable attributes.

→ For example, we then must be holy (practical sanctification).

→ How does this impact your church?

→ What is the practical import?

NOTE: A failure to have a high view of God...

- Leads to a toleration of sin
- Leads to focus on man, evidenced in teaching and programs

RESULT: A man-centered ministry

→ Pleases peers rather than glorifying God

Questions to ponder:

- Does our church practice biblical discipline (cf. Matt. 18)?
- Do the people have a reverence for the character of God?
- Do I compromise truth to please people or maintain the status quo?

2. **An Affirmation of God's Word**

- a. **Inspiration**—verbal, plenary inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21)
→ It is “God-breathed”
- b. **Inerrancy**—it contains no errors. God conveyed divine truth to divinely chosen individuals (Ps. 19)
- c. **Authority**—simply stated: What it says I must do (Ps. 119)!

If we are to have a biblical philosophy of ministry, it must seek its sole authority from the Word of God. As John MacArthur has written:

One of the worst assaults on God's Word comes from people who say they believe the Bible but don't know what it teaches. That is the subtlest kind of attack. People all across America say they believe the Bible from cover to cover but don't know one paragraph of it. How can they believe what they don't know?

Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). If we are fed by every word that comes out of the mouth of God, we ought to study every word (The Master's Plan for the Church [Chicago: Moody, 1991], pp. 26–27).

- d. **Sufficiency**—2 Peter 1:3–4; Psalm 19; 2 Timothy 3:17; Hebrews 4:12

A belief in the sufficiency of Scripture prohibits any attempt to integrate it with psychology or worldly philosophies.

- e. **Relevancy**—It is totally relevant for every situation. (Ps. 19; 2 Tim. 3:17; Ps. 119:105; Is. 40:8)

It may not give us an explicit answer to every specific problem, but it will *always* give us the principles by which we can, through obedience, glorify God.

NOTE: A failure to recognize the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, and relevancy of the Word leads to:

- A pursuit of comfort, rather than obedience
- Personal experience becomes your authority
 - Rather than the authority of God's Word
- Contemporary thinking becomes your guide for living
 - Rather than the principles of divine truth

RESULT: The church produces people who pursue their own desires based upon an ungodly standard.

The outgrowth of this essential component, the right perspective of Scripture, will be a commitment to...

- Teaching sound doctrine (and then)
- Teaching how Christians are to grow.

Questions to ponder:

- Do your people humbly and willingly submit to the authority of the Word?
- Are you teaching the Word in a way that people can apply it to their lives?
- Do you turn to God's Word to find the answers to people's problems?

AN AFFIRMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE BASIS OF A BIBLICAL VIEW OF MANKIND...

3. An Accurate View Man's Nature

- a. Mankind is totally depraved.

- On his own he cannot do good (Rom. 3:10–18)
 - His heart is deceitfully wicked (Jer. 17:9–10)
 - His goal in life is selfishness and only evil continually (Gen. 6:5)
- b. Man was created to glorify God, but because of sin, he seeks to glorify himself (Rom. 3:23).
- Voltaire (French philosopher): “God created man in His image, and man has forever been trying to return the favor.”

NOTE: A sinner is alienated from God, and as a result, he will seek fulfillment (and answers) from the world’s evil system (1 John 2:15–17).

→ The implications are disturbing:

- Christ will not be seen as the only solution to man’s needs.
- Substitutes will be provided that promise fulfillment and a better view of self.
- *Felt* needs rather than *real* needs will be addressed.

RESULT: The church produces people who make choices to solve their life’s problems based on what they believe will practically meet their perceived needs.

Questions to ponder:

- Are your people more Christlike today than they were a year ago? Can they measure their spiritual progress?
- Are you a model of Christ-likeness to your people?
 - An accurate view of man allow us to formulate a ministry that seeks to understand his real needs, not just felt needs.
 - An accurate view of man enables us to correctly understand the purpose of the church

4. A Correct Understanding of the Purpose of the Church

- a. The church exists to worship and glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31; Heb. 13:15)
- b. The church exists to be a repository of divine truth (1 Tim. 3:15).
- c. The church exists to provide a context of loving fellowship with one another for the purpose of mutual edification (Eph. 3:16-19; 4:12-16).
- d. The church exists as a training center whereby people can grow through the application of teaching and the utilization of their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12; Eph. 4).
- e. The church exists to be a light in this dark world, for the evangelization of the lost (Mat. 5:13-16; 28:19-20; Titus 2:11-15).

NOTE: A failure to understand the purpose of the church leads to:

- Glorifying “program success” rather than God.
- People becoming passive spectators rather than active participants.
- Leadership is forced to keep all the programs running.

RESULT: The church becomes an organization run by men and programs, rather than an organism of committed believers empowered by the Spirit of God.

Questions to ponder:

- Do you find yourself caught in “the tyranny of the urgent?”
- Are your people being equipped and motivated to exercise their spiritual giftedness?
- Does your ministry structure revolve around maintaining programs or building character into the lives of your people?
 - A Correct understanding of the purpose of the church helps us to understand the importance of biblical leadership.

5. Godly, Qualified Leadership

- a. Leaders must model the character of Christ for the flock (1 Thess. 2:4-12; 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-5).
- b. Leaders must adequately equip their people to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

- c. Leaders must provide ample opportunity for them to do this work (Heb. 10:24–25).

NOTE:

- A failure to correctly understand biblical leadership leads to unbiblical discipleship and modeling and skewed ministry priorities.
- Lack of adequate equipping for the task leads to frustration, which can produce a high turnover of lay leadership.
- Lack of adequate equipping leads to the failure to reproduce oneself in ministry, which results in the few “faithful” doing all the work.

IV. HOW DO THESE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION STONES IMPACT ONE’S MINISTRY STRATEGY?

A. They Establish Our Duty toward God

1. Scripture calls all believers to *proclaim His glory in worship*
 - a. Worship is one of the defining characteristics of believers (Phil. 3:3)
 - b. Worship is the overflow of being filled w/ Spirit (Eph. 5:18–20)
 - Though primary emphasis in Scripture is on a right heart in worship, the *form of worship* is also significant.
 - The form of worship must provide channels enable the believer to:
 - Grasp the truth of God’s Word
 - Ignite a passion for God
 - Respond to the truths taught
2. Scripture calls all believers to *present ourselves in worship* (Rom. 12:1)
 - a. Through eschewing the lifestyle of the world (Rom. 12:2a)
 - b. Through bringing one’s thinking in line with God’s Word (Rom. 12:2b)

→ This requires that our ministry strategy must be committed to spurring on the flock in this direction!

B. They Establish Our Duty toward the Saints

1. To Edify the Saints

Imperative: note that every believer has been called to full-time ministry!

- a. Exercising the “one-anothers” of Scripture
- b. Exercising one’s spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 1 Pet. 4:10)
 - to serve (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10)
 - to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:12, 26)

2. To Equip the Saints

Imperative: church leaders must equip every believer for ministry!

- a. Through the teaching the Word towards knowledge (2 Tim. 3:16–17)
- b. Through discipling the Word towards obedience (Jas. 1:25)
- c. Through modeling the Word towards reproduction (Luke 6:40; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:3).
 - “Reproduction” in terms of fruitfulness
 - “Reproduction” in terms of future leaders
 - Incorporate leadership training at every level—both active (formal) and passive (modeling)

C. They Establish Our Duty toward Unbelievers

1. To Evangelize through our Walk

- Godly lives testify of Christ’s redemptive work (Titus 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:11–12; 3:1–2; Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:15).

2. To Evangelize through our proclamation of His Word

- His Word is the ordained means (Rom. 10:17; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 23)
- His saints are the ordained messengers (Matt. 28:19–20; Rom. 10:14; 2 Cor. 5:19–20)

CONCLUSION

A well-articulated philosophy of ministry that is biblical is essential to “doing ministry God’s way.” It’s crucial that this biblical philosophy of ministry be the grid through which all your ministry decisions are passed.

It all begins at the top—with leadership. Leaders must be committed to:

- Authenticity of faith
 - A leader must be the example, not the exception
 - A leader must lead his own life before he can lead the lives of others
- Commitment to the Body of Christ
- Excellence in Effort (Eccl. 9:10)
 - Mediocrity generates indifference, but quality invites involvement.
 - Excellence at every level breeds excellence at every level.
- Devotion to prayer (Rom. 12:12)

Develop it...absorb it...live by it...and teach it to your people.

Grace Community Church Mission Statement:

**TO GLORIFY GOD AND EXTEND HIS KINGDOM
BY LIVING AND PROCLAIMING HIS TRUTH IN THE WORLD**

