

THINK BIBLICALLY

A Philosophy of Ministry Built on the Text of Scripture

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INTRODUCTION

Why do you do ministry the way you do?

- Tradition—you've always done it that way?
- Latest trend?
 - Stay on the cutting edge
 - Avant garde
 - To woo people
 - To wow people

I would contend that:

- If God is to bless our ministry, it must be done His way.
- It must be truly biblical.
- It must be thoroughly biblical.

A philosophy of ministry is really a *theology* of ministry.

We must lay 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. DEFINING A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

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

A. First, what is a philosophy of ministry?

It is a set of *principles* that determine how you will function in your ministry.

It is a set of NONNEGOTIABLE *biblical principles* that guide all ministry choices and decisions.

- *Principles define why you do what you do.*
- Principles should be drawn from a careful investigation of:
 - The explicit teaching of Scripture
 - The *implicit* methods/patterns of ministry in the New Testament church

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

Why so crucial? Because:

- The *why* inevitably leads to the *how* of your ministry.
 - There is a cause-and-effect relationship
 - 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.
- You must learn the principle/cause behind the effect.
 - This is the only effective means of passing it on to next generation

II. BENEFITS OF A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

A. It provides a *unity* of direction—everyone pulling the wagon in the same 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*.

A clear philosophy avoids the *competition* trap, as well as *distinction* versus *duplication*.

C. It simplifies *evaluation* of month-to-month and year-to-year goals.

- It gives you a firm grip on *why*; it lets you evaluate the parts.
- “How does this idea/event fulfill the overall ministry philosophy?”

III. FOUNDATION STONES OF A *BIBLICAL* PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

Everyone has a philosophy of ministry.

- They may not realize it.
- They may not be able to articulate it.
- But the questions are:
 - What is my philosophy of ministry?
 - Is it *biblical*?

Thus...how can I evaluate my philosophy of ministry?

- How can I determine whether it’s biblical?
- How do I go about making my approach biblical?

A. Common Approaches

1. Some start with a focus on *programs*.

a. Try to duplicate a “model program.”

Example: “You go to a pastors’ conference 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 vary depending upon 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.

→ How many “how to” books are in your library?

- Lots, right?
- Most are outdated, right?

2. Some start by focusing on *needs* (usually “felt” needs).

a. Ask the people what they want (i.e., felt needs).

Example: The pastor gives titles of various sermons and asks the people to choose.

Problem: This usually results in a superficial, socially oriented program.

- b. Seek to attract people by pleasing them (i.e., felt needs).

Problem: This usually results in a man-centered ministry rather than a God-centered ministry.

3. Some start by establishing *goals*.

What's wrong with setting goals? Nothing. Goals are fine—depending on what kind of goals they are! It depends on what you are trying to achieve.

- a. Some set goals to achieve “success.”

There is nothing wrong with want to succeed. But what kind of success are you after? That is the question!

- Is it the right view of success?
- Is it the biblical view of success?

Problem: Goal-setting can confuse size with success (i.e., thinking 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*.

May have a lot of pop, wow, or numerical response.

- *But...*is it biblical?
- Am I doing God's business God's way?

B. Proper Approach

Any *biblical* ministry must have a truly *biblical* foundation!

What, then, are the biblical foundation stones?

Let me suggest five:

1. A High View of God

- a. God is holy, righteous, and just (among other *perfections*).
- b. Holiness is one of His communicable attributes—thus we must seek to exemplify it!
 - “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16)
 - We, then, must be holy (practical sanctification).

So, I must ask, how does this impact my church?

- What is the practical import?
- What does this say about my philosophy of ministry?

It is crucial. A failure to have a high view of God...

- Leads to a toleration of sin
- Leads to a focus on man
 - Evidenced in your teaching
 - Evidenced in your programs
 - Evidenced in how you do business!

RESULT: A man-centered ministry, pleasing peers rather than glorifying God.

We must ponder some questions:

- Do I compromise truth to please people?
 - To maintain the status quo?
 - To keep people from leaving?
 - To keep money from leaving?
- Do the people in my church have a reverence for the character of God?
 - More than just His love, mercy, kindness, etc.?
- Does my church practice biblical discipline (Matt 18)?

2. An Affirmation of God's Word

A high view of God leads to viewing His Word as the perfect guide for our lives!

a. Inspiration—verbal, plenary inspiration (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21)

- It is “God-breathed.”
- It originates from the very essence and being of God!

b. Inerrancy—it contains no errors. God conveyed divine truth to divinely chosen individuals (Psalm 19).

c. Authority—simply stated: What it says I must do (Psalm 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 proceeds 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 [Moody, 1991], pp. 26–27).

d. Sufficiency—2 Peter 1:3–4; Psalm 19

- 2 Tim. 3:17—“thoroughly furnished/equipped unto all good works!”
- Heb 4:12—“able to judge thoughts and intents of the heart”

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

One only adds things if the original recipe doesn't taste good!

- But this recipe comes inspired and inerrant!
- If you add to it, you're making a statement about the original recipe—about the person who gave it!

e. Relevance—It is totally relevant for every situation (Psalm 19; 119:105).

2 Tim. 3:17—“profitable for....”

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
- An elevation of personal experience above God's Word
- Contemporary thinking, rather than the principles of divine truth, becoming your guide for living

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

Affirmation of God's Word is crucial.

A right perspective of Scripture will be a commitment to:

- Teaching sound doctrine
- Teaching how Christians are to grow and live by it

Questions to ponder:

- Do you turn to God's Word to find the answers to people's problems?
- Do your people humbly and willingly submit to the authority of the Word?

If not, it may be the result of a skewed philosophy of ministry.

3. An Accurate View Man's Nature

An affirmation of God's Word is the basis of a biblical view of mankind.

What does the Bible teach us about mankind? Two very basic things:

a. Mankind is totally depraved.

- On his own, he cannot do good (Rom 3:12—"There is none who does good").
- His heart is deceitfully wicked (Jer 17:9-10; Enosh, Gen 4:26).
- 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: This is because a sinner is alienated from God.

- He will seek fulfillment from the world's evil system (1 John 2:15–17).
- He will seek answers from the world's perspective.

The implications are disturbing:

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

What is the result of this thinking?

- Boot-strap theology!
- The church produces people who make choices to solve their life's problems based on what they believe will practically meet their perceived needs.

An accurate view of man allow us to formulate a ministry that seeks to understand his real needs, not just felt needs. This is *huge!*

- What are man's real needs?
- The answer is found only in Scripture.

An accurate view of the problem is crucial to a proper diagnosis—and solution!

4. A correct understanding of the purpose of the church

An accurate view of man enables us to correctly understand the purpose of the church.

What is the purpose of the church? Let me suggest five:

a. The church exists to worship and glorify God

1 Cor 10:31—"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Heb 13:15—"Through Him, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise."

b. The church exists to be a repository of divine truth.

1 Tim 3:15—"I write so you may know how to conduct yourselves in the church, which is the pillar and support of the truth."

c. The church exists to provide a context of loving fellowship with one another for the purpose of mutual edification (Eph 3:16–19).

Eph 4:12–16—“...for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, to the building up of the body of Christ.”

- 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).

1 Peter 4:10—“As each one has received a gift, employ it in serving one another.”

- e. The church exists to be a light in this dark world, for the evangelization of the lost (Matt 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 being 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?

5. Godly, qualified leadership

A correct understanding of the purpose of the church helps us to understand the importance of biblical 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 Peter 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 people to do the work

Heb 10:24–25—“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good works.”

NOTE: A failure to correctly understand biblical leadership leads to:

- Unbiblical discipleship and modeling
- Skewed ministry priorities
- The “faithful” few doing all the work
- Frustration, often producing a high turnover of lay leadership

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

These five principles are the foundation stones of a biblical foundation of ministry. But how do they determine the direction?

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—“We worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.”

b. Worship is the overflow of being filled with the Spirit.

Eph 5:18–20—“...singing to one another in psalms, hymns...”

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 a ministry strategy 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 Peter 4:10—“employ gift...”)
 - To serve (1 Cor 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10)
 - To edify the church (1 Cor 14:12, 26—gift not for self)
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 toward obedience

James 1:25—“But one who looks intently at the perfect law and abides in it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

- c. Through modeling the Word towards reproduction (Luke 6:40; 1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 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)

Brief Side Note

Acts 14:21–23

1. Evangelize
2. Establish
3. Entrust

Too often we bypass #2; we’ve sent saved people into ministry without establishing them.

B. They establish our duty toward unbelievers

1. To evangelize through our walk

Godly lives testify of Christ's redemptive work (Titus 2:10; 1 Peter 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; 1 Peter 23).

James 1:18—"He brought us forth by the Word of Truth."

- 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.