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PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

What is a Philosophy of Ministry?

Have you ever sat in a church service and wondered why things were structured the way they were? Perhaps, somewhere along the line, someone thought it would be a good idea to hire an interpretive worship dancer. Why? One church passes an offering plate while another drops their tithe into a box at the back of the room. Some congregations order their services around the preaching and teaching of God's Word, whereas others ignore the reading of Scripture altogether. The world is filled with a variety of churches that subscribe to diverse structures of church practice.

What we do as a church (and how we do it) is determined by our philosophy of ministry. Simply stated, a philosophy of ministry is the thought that drives a ministry's actions. It is the reason behind the organization and execution of service. There is no such thing as a thoughtless undertaking; all efforts begin with an idea. Unfortunately, the modern evangelical landscape has been flooded by an ocean of bad ideas. Many, of which, are the result of man-centered theology. In the end, the waters rise and the people drown.

Where Do We Start?

If we are to effectively resist the rising tide of unbiblical thought and practice, we must make every effort to inform our endeavors with Scripture. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote these encouraging words:

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. — 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)

Accepting the Word of God as God's Word is foundational for developing an effective philosophy of ministry. Our sovereign God (who cannot lie and has never made a mistake) has clearly spoken. Therefore, Scripture must be the functioning authority for everything we do. Unlike the word of man, God's Word is entirely inerrant, trustworthy, and true. Once the source and superiority of Scripture has been accepted, God's truth goes to work in the believer's life.

How is this Philosophy Structured?

In an effort to succinctly disclose the philosophy that governs my practice, this document contains five essential duties that I believe are critical for authentic ministry. This list is far from comprehensive or exhaustive, but provides a basic outline of my non-negotiables. The faithful minister of Christ's gospel must exposit truth, exemplify prayer, equip the saints, engage in worship, and evangelize the lost.

Exposit Truth

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. — 2 Timothy 4:1-2

*Regular expository preaching of the Bible is the staple diet of a healthy church.
— Alistair Begg*

Doctrine

These verses (2 Timothy 4:1-2) initiate the last chapter of Paul's death row epistle. Sensing he was about to die, this aging apostle issues one final charge to preach the Word. He does not endorse a clever program of church growth strategies; nor does he encourage Timothy to faithfully exegete the surrounding culture. Rather, he points the church back to its source of truth: The Word of God. He says to be ready at all times and to reprove, rebuke, and exhort from God's Word... whether it is popular or not. How should we do this? With complete patience and teaching.

Philosophy

Expository preaching is the explanation, explication, and elucidation of God's message in Scripture. It begins and ends with the Word of God. The Spirit did not communicate one message with multiple interpretations in mind. Rather, He has provided clear instruction for all things pertaining to life and godliness. As heralds of that instruction, it is our responsibility to remain as true to the text as possible. After all, we have been charged to preach the Word. Therefore, expository preaching is the greatest agency for communicating God's truth.

The call to broadcast this inerrant truth is firmly grounded in the witness of Christ Himself (v1). Representation of Christ (in the sight of Christ) through the proclamation of His Word should never be treated lightly. It is equally important for the preacher to not lose sight of the manner provided in verse 2: with complete patience and teaching. In one sense, no man can live up to the glories contained in Scripture. Yet we are called to preach it faithfully. In his masterwork, *Preaching and Preachers*, the good doctor writes:

I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him. — Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Paul does not give Timothy an excuse for carelessly handling God's Word, but he does provide an example and call to its patient instruction. Likewise, we should preach the whole Word at all times with complete care.

Exemplify Prayer

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. — Romans 12:12

*He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.
— John Bunyan*

Doctrine

Scripture impresses the need for continual prayer in the believer's life. This is a divine command, not an earthly suggestion. It is sometimes asked: *If God is sovereign over all His creation, why pray?* After all, He will always accomplish whatever He has purposed (Eph 1:11; Ps 135:6; Prov 19:21, 21:1), so what difference does my prayer make? Such an approach to sovereignty and prayer is the result of backwards thinking. Scripture provides at least five reasons for the Christian's obedience in prayer:

- 1) God has Commanded Us to Pray – Luke 11, 18, 22:40; 1 Thes 5:17; Eph 6:18-19; and 1 Tim 2:1
- 2) Jesus Modeled a Life of Prayer – Matt 14:23; Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:18 and 28, 22:31; and John 17
- 3) God is Able to Respond to Our Prayers – (Good luck finding a verse in the Bible that does not prove this point.)
- 4) God Actually Does Respond to Our Prayers – Matt 7; 1 Chron 4:10; and James 5
- 5) God Has Ordained Prayer as a Means by Which He Accomplishes His Eternal Purposes – Gen 20:7 and 17; Job 42:7-9; and Jer 29:12-14

Prayer should continually characterize the daily conduct of our lives. It ignites the soul with godly passions and holy trajectory. It is essential to the vitality of our walk with Christ.

Philosophy

It is better to flip the initial question around and ask: *If God is not sovereign over all His creation, why pray?* If He is just as surprised by our experiences as we are, then what assurance do we have that He will hear our prayers at all (let alone do anything about them)? I would rather pray to a God who knows all things, controls all things, and rules over all things. That God has the ability to answer prayer according to His perfect wisdom, power, and authority. The fact that God knows everything should be a great comfort to us when we pray. If He didn't, our hope would be fastened to the inadequate abilities of an imperfect deity who wishes He could do more for us than He can. Thankfully, our God is so much greater than that.

Our response to God's command for prayer must be one of faith and obedience. Our Savior is the only man who has ever walked in perfect faithfulness to God's righteous standard in all things. If anyone might possibly have a right to throw God's sovereignty onto the table as an excuse for neglect, it was Him. Rather, He modeled continual prayer through trust and submission. Scripture is replete with examples of God altering the course of human history in response to the prayers of His people. These truths and more should continually drop us to our knees.

Equip the Saints

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. — Ephesians 4:11-12

The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means of doing both. — John Calvin

Doctrine

Equipping the saints is one of the primary functions of church leadership. According to the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, the word “equip” in Ephesians 4:12 refers to “the preparation of the church for becoming perfect, but not to this perfection itself, as can be seen from the use of *teleios* (complete, mature; → Goal), *hēlikia* (stature; → Age, Stature), and *plērōma* (→ fullness) in v. 13.” Here, the saints are effectively equipped with truth from one source: The Word of God. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Scripture alone informs and matures the body of Christ for its protection and strength.

Philosophy

In the tenth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul does not ask the question: *How are they to hear and believe unless someone invites them to join your fellowship?* Scripture never encourages us to invite unbelievers into the church so they might be saved. The church is not a clinic for waking dead souls, although many have come to Christ while visiting churches. Rather, we are called to strengthen the body through mutual edification and instruction for the purpose of sending those saints into the world to make disciples.

God has blessed the church with various roles and gifts. However, the emphasis of each station listed in Ephesians 4 is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. This is a shared responsibility that does not begin nor end with leadership. Leadership’s goal should be the arming of the saints for active works of service so that Christ may be glorified through the building up of His church. Unfortunately, many congregations view their pastors as priests. The seeds of pride and destruction find fertile soil in the hearts of men who say, “look at me” rather than “look to Christ!” It is a great disservice and abuse of position for leadership to stand in place of God’s Word as the saints’ authority for growth in righteousness. Rather, we must actively equip them with the living Word and encourage their gifting within the church.

Engage in Worship

**While worship involves so much more than music,
this section addresses corporate harmony in song.**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

— Colossians 3:16-17

Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our hearts, minds and spirits. A person who does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God does not deserve to be called a human being! — Martin Luther

Doctrine

Music is a powerful teaching device. We remember songs. Truth set to music has a way of employing and addressing the whole person. The Bible has over 500 references to singing and at least 50 commands to participate in songs of praise. Colossians 3:16-17 provides a list of what to sing (psalms and hymns and spiritual songs) and how to sing (with thankfulness in your hearts to God). Paul does not encourage his readers to perform catchy radio tunes devoid of thoughtful lyrical content. Nor does he condone insufferable arrangements that cool the heart of all gratitude. Rather, he rightly directs the church to emotionally engage in songs of meaningful praise and worship. Why do we sing as we gather together? Because the Word of Christ dwells in us richly.

Philosophy

You can tell a lot about a church by what and how they sing. Corporate worship should be a cognizant response to the gospel that overflows with praise. Doctrine leads to devotion. Therefore, truth must drive our affections as we sing. If doctrine is skewed or absent... devotion will do little to sustain the singer, encourage the listener, or ultimately glorify God. However, let's not mistakenly confine truth to a certain style of music. Colossians 3:16-17 paints a picture of variety (psalms and hymns and spiritual songs) and our gatherings should express diversity as well. The glory of Christ cannot be contained and expressed through one particular style. Even good songs transform into idols when we become enthralled with the vehicle rather than the Savior.

Congregational participation in public worship ought to absorb the mind in a way that fills the heart. If our affections are not moved, we might be doing it wrong. Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest preachers in American history, once wrote, "The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections." He adds, "There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose and with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections." True biblical worship is not purely a mental exercise, but the informed expression of a thankful heart.

Evangelize the Lost

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"
— Romans 10:14-15

If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.
— Charles Spurgeon

Doctrine

Evangelism should be as natural to the Christian as breathing. Some individuals are specially gifted for sharing the gospel with strangers. However, this does not exempt all believers from making the most of every opportunity to share their faith. The God of all creation is also the God of all time. He holds our days and directs our paths. God's sovereignty over evangelism should make us prayerful, patient, and bold. True evangelism is not motivated by guilt, but glory.

Philosophy

God's power and authority over evangelism should make us prayerful. As previously stated in the section on prayer... if God is not sovereign over all He creates, then what assurance do we have that He will hear our prayers at all (let alone do anything about them)? Thankfully, He knows all things, controls all things, and rules over all things... including salvation. No one enters the Kingdom by accident. He answers prayer in alignment with His perfect wisdom, power, and authority. Evangelism should drive us to our knees.

An understanding of God's sovereignty also provides patience, confidence, and perspective. According to Acts 19:8-9, Paul withdrew from a crowd he had been reasoning with for three months when they "became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation." As much as he wanted to see all men saved, he realized that salvation belongs to the Lord. This understanding gave him the patience to reason with the crowd, the confidence to walk away when appropriate, and the perspective to recognize that it was not his responsibility to take more upon himself than what God had called him to do.

Finally, the power and privilege of evangelism should embolden us to unashamedly proclaim the gospel of life to a dying world whenever possible. Some are especially gifted in the area of evangelism and engaging unbelievers in ways that will not shame the name of Christ. Others, while well intentioned, are not as gifted. However, we are all called to be ready at all times to defend our faith, declare the truth of Scripture, and testify to the glories of Christ. In so much as we are capable, it is our responsibility under the sovereignty of God to reach the lost. A time is coming when evangelism will be a thing of the past. Until then, let's faithfully make the most of every opportunity God has provided.