



## chapter 5



# A Biblical Church

**"WHOEVER PRACTICES AND TEACHES  
COMMANDS WILL BE CALLED GREAT."**

**—Matthew 5:19**

"I have been saying in recent days that maybe, just may be, God designed a truly biblical Church. Maybe He designed it to be led by leaders and taught by teachers and administrated by administrators and shepherded by shepherds. Is that a possibility in your thinking?" So spoke Bill Hybels at The Church in the Twenty-First Century conferences sponsored by Leadership Network in 1991.<sup>1</sup>

My first assignment in seminary was to write a paper about "the Source and Norm of Theology." Two words summarize my paper: the Bible. God's holy word is the source of what we believe and the norm by which we appraise our behaviour. In other words, the Bible is our reliable guide for faith and practice.

The church in which the Lay Pastors Ministry can happen is the church that hears God by knowing, believing and practicing biblical truths. It is a word-driven church. The Bible, however, is not a Christian idol, it is the medium through which God reveals Himself and His will to His people.

Jesus' barbed response to the Sadducees' trick question in Matthew 22:23-32 applies to many twentieth-century church leaders: "You are in error because you do not know the Scripture or the power of God's" (v.29).

Two Scriptures that many leaders seem to be unfamiliar with are Ephesians 4:11, 12, instructing pastors to equip God's people to do ministry, and 1 Peter 5:1-4, changing laypeople to pastorally care for God's people.

The ancient error of the Sadducees in the modern error of leaders who build on the same sands of tradition, reason and arrogance. They perpetuate the *tradition* that the pastor's role is to do ministry while the people's role is to receive ministry. They *reason* that the best handbook for church life and growth is written by credential people whose studies and programs are based on tradition. Their arrogance makes them unaware of their delusion, comfortable with the status quo and resistant to a

paradigm shift. They have "paradigm paralysis," the inability to break out of ingrained patterns of thinking and acting.

This error explains why the expenditure of human resources, energy and money continue without corresponding results. It also explains the frustration, disillusionment, anger and burnout or so many vocational ministries.

The good news, however, is that an ever-increasing number of church leaders are seeking the guidance and inspiration of the Scriptures. They are experiencing the truth of Hebrews 4:12: "The word of God is living and active." It works!

During one of my first trips to Nassau, Bahamas, to conduct a Lay Pastors Equipping Seminar, the bishop of the Anglican Church told me, "If our people can see that it is in the Bible and if they can understand it, they will do it." That is what I called "biblical."

Seeing that lay pastoral care is in the Bible is the key to having it happen in your church. To be a biblical church is to be participating in the second Reformation: giving the ministry to the people. It is to experience what Isaiah meant by his prophecy, "See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isa. 43:19).

Let's look to three Scriptures for three pivotal truths, expecting to correct the Sadducees' error. The first is Ephesians 4:7-12, *The Pivotal Doctrine*:

But grace was given to each of us....he gave gifts....And his gifts were that some should be...pastors and teachers, [to equip] the saints [God's people] for the work of ministry (*RSV*).

The doctrine is that every Christian is a minister: Five words shine like the five points of a star to set forth this doctrine: grace, gifts, equip, saints and ministry. This doctrine fuels the second Reformation. Let's closely examine these five words:

**Grace:** This word means God's favor, generosity and goodness. God gives His grace in three forms: (1) salvation (see Eph. 2:8); (2) revelation (see 3:2,3); and (3) ministry (see 4:7). Grace is powerful because it saves, reveals and gives gifts for ministry.

**Gifts:** Many kinds of spiritual gifts have been given, and not one Christian in the whole world and in all of history has ever been overlooked. The cluster of gifts for pastoral care includes mercy, encouragement, exhortation and serving. Just as we all intended that people use the gifts we give them, God expects the same of us. We do not choose our gifts for ministry, Christ apportions them (see Eph. 4:7,8).

**Equip:** Preparation for ministry is an essential part of the formula. God would not think of sending His people out to do His work without adequate preparation. He has assigned pastors and teachers the task of equipping His

people to do their ministries.

**Saints (*Laos, God's people*):** God's first call to us is to be His. Through repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ we are born into His family. We are no longer our own (see 1 Cor. 6:19,20). As His people, we have the privilege of access to Him and the honor of doing work for Him. We may not always behave and talk like His people, but by His grace we are.

**Ministry:** God's second call to us is to do ministry. Ministry is some special service we do for God. Why do we resist? Moses was glad to be one of God's chosen, but when God called him to a certain task, he stubbornly resisted with some familiar reasons: not worthy, not credentialed, frightened and not competent. His final resistance was a desperate appeal to God to send someone else (see Exod. 3—4). Every Christian is a ministry by virtue of the fact that God gives gifts (special abilities) to every Christian with which to do ministry and calls every Christian to a special task that utilizes those gifts. If God gives you a ministry (your special task), it follows that *you are minister*. Many do not know this; and many who do know it are not doing it. But neither ignorance nor disobedience changes the fact that every Christian is a minister.

I have been preaching and teaching this doctrine in scores of settings for two decades, discovering again and again that it is truly *a pivotal doctrine*—the central point on which "the second Reformation" turns.

If I were the only one heralding this doctrine, or if the Lay Pastors Ministry were the only ministry laypeople were doing, my voice would never be heard. But by adding it to others, all orchestrated by God's Spirit, it is loudly resounding through to the world. This sound is nothing less than the voice of the Spirit, energizing the Church with new life and energy as it motives into the twenty-first century. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The second of three Scriptures is I Peter 5:2,3—*The Pivotal Charge*:

Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. (RSV)

The charge is to "tend the flock of God." The *New International Version* reads, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care."

This charge is pivotal because it was given to laypeople. They were elders of churches in five Roman provinces. It was true then, as it is today, that no one

credentialed person or staff of credentialed people can "tend the flock" (pastorally care for all of God's people). Please note that the word *charge* is used twice. I take this to be God's way of underscoring the urgency of caring for His people.

All seven chapters in Part 1 of this book focus on this charge. It takes a need-conscious, gift-oriented, egalitarian, ministry-balanced,

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biblical, mobilized and failure-resistant church to pastor God's people.

As we look closely to this Scripture we observe that the charge is noticeably positioned among a cluster of other items: (1) the people, (2) the spirit, (3) the motive and (4) the payoff.

The *people* in which the charge is given are laypeople. You can imagine who they are: shopkeepers, shippers, farmers, builders, shepherds, fishermen, wives, husbands, neighbors and other very common folk.

The *spirit* in which the charge is to be carried out is a spirit of willingness, not obligation, a spirit of eagerness, not greed for money.

The *motive* is to serve by being the best example possible, not to hold a position of power with which to lord it over others.

There is a *payoff*. For faithfully executing the charge, the laypeople will receive a crown of glory when the Chief Shepherd appears, a crown that will never fade away.

Our third Scripture is Exodus 18:13-26—*The Pivotal Model*. I call it the Mosaic model of pastoral care:

What you are doing is not good....Select capable men...and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens...That will make our load lighter, because they will share it with you.<sup>2</sup>

This model demonstrates what decentralizing pastoral care will do for both the pastor and the people. The people will receive adequate care and the pastors will have time to do with God called them to do as spiritual leaders.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, observed that both Moses and the people were wearing themselves out. Moses was trying to do the impossible: care for all the people himself. The people were expecting Moses to do the impossible: give personal attention to each one. It was not working.

The passage rapidly moves from the *condition* through the *solution* to the

*betterment*. As I cite the following three movements almost verbatim, I invite you, my readers, to prayerfully consider where you are in the changing scenes. Every time I do this for myself, I am both affirmed and reprov'd. This may be the moment of paradigm shift for someone.

**The Condition:**

- What you are doing is not good.
- You will only wear yourself out.
- The work is too heavy for you.
- You cannot handle it alone.

**The Solution:**

- You must be the people's representative before God.
- Teach them.
- Show them the way to live.
- Show them the duties they are to perform.
- Select capable people, appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens; have them serve.
- Have them bring the difficult cases to you.

**The betterment:**

- Your load will be lighter.
- They will share your load with you.
- You will be able to stand the strain.
- The people will be satisfied.

Whether a vocational minister or a volunteer minister, each of us is located somewhere on this continuum. From wherever we discover ourselves to be, we are changed to take the next step; or, if we discovered that we have already progressed from *the condition* through *the solution* to *the betterment*, we are challenged to strive for excellence in the solution scene.

I have enough faith to believe that for some readers this moment is a dramatic moment of Christian formation in your lives. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

If a church is to be biblical, it must deal with the problem of mythology, for mythology grows alongside theology like tears grow alongside wheat. Mythology has the appearance of biblical theology, assumes the authority of biblical theology and is accepted as biblical theology.

A simple example of this is the Christmas story about three wise men. Scripture simply records that Magi (traditionally wise men) from the east came to Jerusalem (see Matt. 2:1). Mythology numbers them (the words of one of our Christmas hymns are "We *three kings* from orient are") and, in some cases, even names them.

In a similar way mythology has grown alongside the theology of ministry! For centuries, in fact, the growth of the unbiblical myth about ministry—that only clergy are

ministers—was widely accepted as biblical truth. This tare looked so much like wheat that it was (and continues to be in traditional-minded churches) substituted for the biblical teaching that all Christians are ministers.

The Church emerged from the New Testament as a "body" in which each part is given gifts for ministry and all "parts" are equally important in doing ministry. The "body" concept prevail in every large town of the Roman Empire and to such distant places as Britain, Carthage and Persia. After Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in A.D. 312,<sup>3</sup> the "body" concept was covered over.

In the centuries following, mythology flourished. It identified ministry with an office rather than a *charism*. A *charism* (Greek, pronounced kar'izum) is a special gift or power divinely conferred upon a person. Prominence, privilege and power were attributed to certain people because of their offices. The Church gradually became more an organization than an organism.

In the centuries following, mythology about ministry that has grown alongside theology these many centuries is:

- There are two classes of Christians, clergy and laity.
- The clergy are the ministers; the laity are receivers.
- A person becomes a minister by formal education and ordination.

One of the dynamics operating in this mythology is that *the people make the Church, and then the Church makes the people*. The people of

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that era made the Church hierarchical and, except for some significant variances throughout history, the Church made successive generations of churches hierarchical.

But today, "things are a changin." The rediscovery of the pivotal theology, charge and model previously described is demythologizing the Church, giving it new life and returning it to the "body" concept. It is breaking free from its encumbrances. This is one of the most exciting times in the history of the Church!

Not all of the Church, however, is breaking free. Many individual church leaders, both clergy and laity, are not yet separating myth from truth. It is extremely difficult to break with tradition. How do we do it? How do we change?

Management consultant Ken Blanchard says that change can happen in four ways:

1. Knowledge: adding a new piece of information to your mind;
2. Attitude: changing the way you think about something;
3. Behavior: altering a habit or the way you perform a

particular function; and

4. Organizational behavior: changing the way an entire group of people does something.<sup>4</sup>

Let's try to understand Blanchard's four ways of change.

### **Knowledge**

The preceding pages may have added significantly to what you already knew. I trust that it has. It is said that *knowledge is power*. Jesus taught, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Proverbs 24:5 reads, "A man [or woman] of knowledge increases strength." You have the necessary knowledge to change.

### **Attitude**

When knowledge penetrates a person's spirit, attitude changes. Biblical knowledge about ministry shapes how pastors see themselves and how they see themselves. Pastors begin to see themselves as equippers and encouragers of ministers rather than the chief doers of ministry. The people begin to see themselves as having ministries of their own, believing that they too are ministers. The experience an attitudinal change.

### **Behavior**

Changing how we do things is very difficult because of our formal training, tradition and ecclesiastical culture. It change is to occur, it will come about by prayer and biting the bullet; we will pray, make the change, and let the chips fall where they may. change is uncomfortable. Change puts us at risk. Change draws criticism. But change is also exhilarating, refreshing and renewing. It is the nature of everything that is alive. Changes in knowledge and attitude are significant, but nothing really changes until behavior changes.

### **Organizational Behavior**

This is the most complex because enough of the members of congregation have to move through the other three to change the culture of a church. People do not all move at the same time nor at the same pace, so vision, prayer, perseverance and patience are required—and in that order. Know that if corporate behavior (the culture of a church) does not change, any changes taking place are not really changes. They are only temporary, short-lived alterations that eventually revert to the way things were previously done and lead to heartbreak for those initiating them.

If you are looking for some practical, usable ideas to change your church, you will find change-power in doing the following things:

- **Create a favorable culture.** Preaching, teaching, writing, meeting and modeling contribute to creating a spiritual, emotional and rational climate. This, in turn,

is conducive to successfully pursuing a vision that differ from the traditional. Culture must be defined to create a favorable lay ministry of any kind. "Culture" is that which most people in the church know is expected, permitted and appropriate. Ministries that are incongruent with the culture of a church will fail n matter how biblical, well organized, well promoted or heavily endorsed they are.<sup>5</sup>

- **Help people discover their ministries.** Gifts, passion, experience, personality, training and life situation all contribute to the ministry a person should be doing. Classes, seminars, workshops, publications and consultations can facilitate people in their search.
- **Create structures for ministry.** Set priorities for the church and move on them by designing ministries that will accomplish them. For most ministries, usable models already exist. By adopting or adapting them, you will not have to "reinvent the wheel."
- **Celebrate ministry.** Creative ways to focus attention on proposed ministries, new ministries, longtime ministries or just the idea of laypeople doing ministry will create a fun environment. It will help people to enjoy doing ministry. Some churches has a Sunday each year on which they recognize their "volunteer ministers." Some have an annual celebration event such as a dinner, banquet or picnic to affirm their "volunteer ministers."

"He who has an ear let them hear what the spirit says [through the Bible] to the churches!"

**Notes:**

1. NEXT (Tyler, Tex.: a publication of Leadership Network, August 1995).
2. See appendix A for two diagrams of the Mosaic Model: the first, Ministry Centralized; the second, Ministry Decentralized.
3. Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1982), pp. 42, 108.
4. Ken Blanchard, *Forum Files* (Tyler, Tex.: a publication of Leadership Network, January 1994).
5. For a more complete treatment of "culture"—its controlling power and how to change it. Change of culture enabled them to launch a successful Lay Pastors Ministry.