

City on a Hill by Philip Ryken, Chicago, Ill.: Moody Publishers, 2003
(53 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

Chapter 1 The Church in the Twenty-first Century

1. “Do whatever works.”

If irrelevance is the enemy, then churches constantly have to figure out how to stay relevant. Wagner offers a number of suggestions for doing this, but perhaps the most significant is reducing theology to the shortest possible list of essential doctrines. Theological instruction is said to be irrelevant, especially if it is thorough and precise. This is in sharp contrast to the original Reformation, which was all about theology. The Protestant mottoes were *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli Deo gloria*: Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, so that God alone gets all the glory. This is what the reformers taught because they believed in *sola Scriptura*-Scripture alone-which is where all these great doctrines are found. What, then, is the motto of the so-called new reformation? At times it seems as if some churches are opting for fiat *quidvis efficiens*: "Do whatever works."

When churches make relevance their primary goal, they are vulnerable to the twin perils of postmodernism: relativism and narcissism. They succumb to relativism because they are willing to sacrifice biblical principles for popular success. And they are guilty of narcissism because they crave the acceptance of secular society, as if "the interests and ambitions of the unconverted can somehow be harnessed to win their approval for Christ."⁸ [Pages 21-22]

2. Always Look to Bible

So where should we look? If we only look to the future, we run the risk of abandoning our spiritual heritage. However, if we look to the past, then we may live in the past, and thereby fail to serve God effectively in our own times. What we should do instead is live in the present, learn from the past, and anticipate the future, while always looking to the Bible. [Page 23]

3. A Church with a Passion for God’s Word

The only church that will survive in post-Christian times is a church with a passion for God's Word. This means reading the Bible, both privately and in services of public worship. It means preaching the Bible by way of systematic exposition. It means studying the Bible, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. It means teaching the Bible, so that every group and every ministry in the church is guided and directed by the voice of God's Spirit speaking in Scripture. It is not enough to have a high doctrine of Scripture; the church must also make regular use of Scripture. A church for post-Christian times is a teaching church-a church that longs to know God's mind as revealed in God's Word. [Pages 25-26]

4. Share Material Possessions

There are really only three attitudes that a person can take toward material possessions. The thief says, "What's yours is mine; I'll take it" The selfish person says, "What's mine is mine; I'll keep it." But the caring person says, "What's mine is really God's, and so I'll share it:" ¹¹ And that is exactly what Christians did in the first century. They made a radical commitment to Christian community, which included a willingness to give time and money to meet one another's needs: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:44-45) [Page 28]

5. Biblical Method for Church Growth

The evangelical church has begun to decline, and it is hard to imagine how it can grow in the twenty-first century. But there is a biblical method for church growth. It is to become a teaching, worshiping, caring church. Such a church has God's approval, and with His blessing, it will grow. [Page 30]

6. Simply Bible Reading and Preaching

The charter members of the first church in Jerusalem were a remarkable group of men and women. By the power of God's Spirit they turned the world upside down, starting the most remarkable institution in human history. Yet anyone who has ever been to a good church cannot help but notice that what they did was thoroughly ordinary. There was Bible reading and preaching. There was corporate worship, including prayer and the sacraments. There was fellowship and evangelism. They simply did the things that Christians since then have always done-which is exactly the point! Wherever Christians have joined together to establish teaching, worshiping, and caring communities, they have been able to meet the unique challenges they faced from the surrounding culture. [Page 30]

7. God's Permanent Plan for the Church

The prevailing mind-set is relativism, the denial of universal truth. The way to respond is by remaining devoted to the apostolic teaching of Scripture. People are looking for some other message, delivered by some other means. However, what God has appointed for the salvation of sinners and for their subsequent growth in grace is the preaching of the gospel, together with the teaching of biblical doctrine. This is God's permanent plan for the church. It also happens to be the perfect antihistamine for a culture that is allergic to truth.

The heart of post-Christian culture is narcissistic, but the Bible has a remedy for self-infatuation: God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled worship. In worship we turn away from ourselves to adore the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Once our hearts have turned to God in prayer and praise, we are then able to reach out to others in love and concern. This kind of Christian caring is the answer to many, if not most, contemporary problems. It is the answer to the breakup of the family, for in a caring

church people learn how to keep commitments that put others first. It is the answer to racism, for a caring church is united by Christ across the things that divide. It is the answer to poverty, for in a caring church all needs are met, including the deepest needs of the soul. Whether people realize it or not, what our crumbling culture needs most is authentic Christian community.

To summarize, what God wants the church to be and to do turns out to be exactly what the world needs. Admittedly, the world may not want to hear it, since in post-Christian times the church becomes a kind of countercultural community. To a relativistic culture, skeptical of meaning, the church preaches the truth of God's eternal Word. To a narcissistic culture, alienated by sin, the church issues an invitation to worship and fellowship. And this is precisely what a post-Christian culture needs: a church that stands out as truly Christian. [Pages 31-32]

8. Basic Biblical Priorities

These basic biblical priorities can be summarized in a single purpose statement: For the honor of Jesus Christ, a twenty-first century church needs to develop and maintain a strong teaching pulpit, an effective network of fellowship groups aimed at meeting individual needs, a program of Christian education to promote the steady growth of God's family to spiritual maturity, and, in cooperation with other Christians, an evangelistic outreach to the local community and to the world beyond. [Page 33]

Chapter 2. Making God's Word Plain

9. Today's Myths

The word "myth" sounds rather primitive. People today do not still believe in *myths*, do they? Of course they do. A myth is any popular belief that guides human thought and conduct but is not based on God's truth. There is the myth of individualism, the idea that I can make it on my own. There is the myth of victimization, that my personal problems are due primarily or exclusively to the sins of others. There is the myth of materialism, the assumption that there is always something I can buy that will make me happy. Then there is the grand myth of evolutionism, the belief that, in the words of one Harvard scientist, "Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind."² These are some of the myths of our times-popular yet unbiblical beliefs that shape the way Americans think and act. [Page 38]

10. God's Openness

There is a growing movement among some evangelicals to advocate the "openness of God," or "open theism." (It is, of course, questionable whether it is still legitimate for them to lay claim to the title "evangelical.") This is an attempt to solve the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility by denying that God has full knowledge of the future. The new evangelical deity is a risk-taker whose will is sometimes thwarted and whose plans often change in response to the actions of human beings. This

doctrine of God is purported to be more faithful to the Scriptures. However, it is a radical departure from biblically orthodox teaching about divine foreknowledge. The true God is all-knowing. He says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isa. 46:9-10). [Pages 39-40]

11. Know the Bible, Serve Anywhere

A Christian who knows the Bible is fully trained to serve God at home, at work, in the church, and everywhere else in a post-Christian culture. [Page 44]

12. Christ-centered Instruction

In these post-Christian times, a major pastoral task is to explain Christianity to people who really have no idea what it means. And once people come to Christ, they need to be taught the basic doctrines that will help them think and act the way a Christian should.

It would be a mistake to think that doctrinal preaching is something different from evangelical preaching. The New Testament makes little or no distinction between teaching and evangelism. The apostles understood that the gospel is for Christians as well as non-Christians. Thus their teaching was always evangelistic and their evangelism included a heavy dose of teaching. In keeping with their example, Christian preaching for post-Christian times must be squarely doctrinal as well as solidly evangelical. There can be no preaching for conversion without an announcement of Christ's divine person and saving work, both of which need to be explained in clear doctrinal terms. Similarly, no aspect of Christian theology should ever be taught apart from its relationship to Jesus Christ. And when theological instruction is Christ-centered, it has the power to draw people to salvation in Him. [Pages 46-47]

13. Making God's Word Plain

During the Protestant Reformation John Calvin made a claim that we can only pray to make about evangelical churches in the twenty-first century. He said: "It is certain that if we come to church we shall not hear only a mortal man speaking but we shall feel (even by his secret power that God is speaking to our souls, that he is the teacher. He so touches us that the human voice enters into us and so profits us that we are refreshed and nourished by it. God calls us to him as if he had his mouth open and we saw him there in person"⁵ And God most clearly speaks this way through a sermon if it is expository-that is, if it makes God's Word plain. [Page 49]

Chapter 3. Giving Praise to God

14. A Time of No Place for Truth

The way Christians worship is always influenced by the surrounding culture. In these post-Christian times, relativism affects our view of truth and of God, like the Internet executive who said, "I believe in God, but each person has to define that on their own."

It is not surprising that in the culture that invented the salad bar and do-it-yourself furniture, people now believe in defining their own deity.

Narcissism, or self-love, also gets plenty of support in a post-Christian culture. Educators and advertisers constantly promote self-help, self-esteem, self-improvement, self-actualization -anything and everything having to do with the self. We are living in relativistic and narcissistic times, when there is no place for truth, but there is always more room for me.

What happens to worship in such a culture? At least two things. One is that God's Word tends to get ignored. In an age of relativism, when people are allergic to absolutes, the Bible becomes increasingly irrelevant. People who demand the freedom to define reality on their own terms have little use for a divinely ordained perspective on their existence. So we are now suffering what the brilliant French apologist Jacques Ellul called "the humiliation of the word"² When image is everything, public worship gives less and less time to the reading and preaching of God's Word. [Pages 56-57]

15. Like Having Our Own Way

...what happens in a relativistic culture is a change of message: God is no longer allowed to speak His authoritative Word. What happens in a narcissistic culture is a change of audience: Worship is not primarily for God's benefit, but for our own. We like having things our way. Self-centeredness has always been a temptation for God's people. What is new is that many church leaders are now saying that what happens in worship ought to be governed by what people want, that we should let culture determine our approach to worship. [Page 58]

16. Word-communicating, God-glorifying, and Christ-confessing Worship

Disagreements about how to worship always expose fundamental differences in doctrine. Worship wars are never merely cultural; they are always partly theological. As long as worship is regarded simply as a matter of style or taste, the wars will never end. What the church needs today is a theology of worship to guide its practice of worship.

A biblical theology for Christian worship is taught on every page of Scripture, but perhaps the shortest complete definition comes from Paul's letter to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:16-17). Although these verses also have wider implications, they help set the parameters for the proper worship of God: The content of worship comes from the Bible, the goal of worship is to give praise to God, and the basis for worship is the saving work of

Jesus Christ. Put more simply, true Christian worship is Word-communicating, God-glorifying, and Christ-confessing. [Pages 59-60]

17. Worship God in the Right Way

What is the role of the Bible in public worship? First, the various elements of worship are explicitly commanded by Scripture. According to what is sometimes called "the regulative principle for worship," we are not allowed to worship any way we please, but only the way that God pleases. It is not enough to worship the right God; we must also worship Him in the right way, and that means worshipping Him as He has prescribed in His Word. As the Reformers put it, worship must be "according to Scripture." And according to Scripture, the primary elements of worship are praying, reading and preaching God's Word, singing praises, administering the sacraments, and presenting tithes and offerings. In His Word God has reserved a place for each of these activities in public worship. [Pages 60-61]

18. New Spiritual Reality

It is only when we remember to give praise to God that our worship is able to do its gospel work. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul imagines an unbeliever getting converted during a worship service. What convinced the man to become a Christian? It was not because he felt comfortable. It was not because he liked the music. It was not because he felt like he could relate to the worship service. No, it was the preaching of God's Word, in a context where all the glory was given to God. Paul wrote, "If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (I Cor. 14:24-25). The man did not come to faith because he was in a familiar environment, but because he was confronted with a whole new spiritual reality. [Pages 67-68]

19. Reconciled to Christ before Worship

Whenever Christians gather for worship-even in twos and threes-they meet in Jesus' name (Matt. 18:20). What does it mean to give thanks to God in and through "the name of the Lord Jesus"? To worship in Jesus' name means to worship God on the basis of Christ's sufferings and death. In this connection it is worth noting that the phrase "with gratitude" can also be translated "in the grace," meaning the grace that God has given through Jesus Christ. It is only on the basis of Christ's atoning work that anyone can ever approach God. Before we can approach God in worship, we must be reconciled to Him through Christ and His cross. "Once you were alienated from God," Paul reminded the Colossians, "and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:21-22). [Pages 69-70]

20. Worship Communicates the Word of God

If we are to please God in our worship, then, our worship must be Word-communicating, God-glorifying, and Christ-honoring. A great deal more could be said about how to apply these principles, but having the right theology of worship will help us please God in our practice of worship. Does our worship communicate the right content, which is the Word of God? Are we pursuing the right goal, which is to glorify God? Are we coming on the right basis, which is the saving work of Jesus Christ? [Page 70]

Chapter 4. Growing Together in Groups

21. Defined by Relationship to God

The body of Christ includes everyone who is connected to Jesus Christ by faith. How does someone become part of this body? Through baptism, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (I Cor. 12:13a; cf. Gal. 3:27). Scholars debate whether baptism here refers to water baptism or to some kind of spiritual baptism. Possibly both are in view. Certainly we are joined to the body of Christ as soon as we are born again by God's Spirit. But the outward sign of belonging to His body is water baptism. This shows the vital importance of baptism in post-Christian times. We belong to the body of Christ, and what places us in that alternative community is the sacrament of baptism. Baptism is a countercultural act, almost a form of protest. Over against everything else that tries to define us—our career, our citizenship, our status as consumers in a market economy—baptism locates our primary identity in the body of Christ, specifically as members of a local church. We are not defined by what we do, where we live, or what we buy. We are defined by our relationship to God, who by His Spirit has joined us to the body of Christ. [Page 76]

22. America as Segregated as Ever

...in these post-Christian times, America is a deeply divided country, characterized by alienation, isolation, and segregation. Surprising evidence for this comes from the 2000 U.S. Census, which revealed that although our country is becoming more and more ethnically diverse, our communities remain as segregated as ever, if not more so. One analyst concluded that "four decades of efforts to integrate communities have largely failed. While other research suggests that racial attitudes with regard to housing have lessened, actual settlement patterns remain rooted in the past. Children of the early 21st century will likely grow up isolated from people of other ethnic groups."⁶

23. We Need Each Other

But the moment we start to think about how important we are to the body of Christ, it becomes impossible to do any really Christian work at all, because serving Christ is all about serving others: "Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (I

Cor. 10:24). Spiritual gifts are never intended for private use, but are always for the benefit of the whole church. Or as Paul said in I Corinthians 12:7, spiritual gifts are given "for the common good:" Thus we are mutually interdependent. What is true for the human body is true for the body of Christ: The various parts cannot exist on their own, but they depend on the life of the whole body. To put it very simply, we need each other.

Chapter 5. Shepherding God's Flock

24. Leaders Are a Team of Shepherds

What is striking about these three terms-elder, bishop, and shepherd (or pastor-is that they are used interchangeably. All three titles are used to identify the same group of men. An elder is a bishop, and a bishop is a shepherd, or pastor. The same connection is made by the apostle Peter: "To the elders [*presbuterous*] among you ... Be shepherds [*poimante*] of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers [*episkopountes*]" (I Peter 5:1-2; cf. Titus 1:5-7). This is a clue that the biblical pattern for spiritual leadership is not hierarchical, but collegial. God does not intend for bishops to rule the pastors, who in turn govern the elders. Instead, God has invested spiritual authority in a group of men-use whichever term for them you like-who together give wise counsel, spiritual oversight, and personal care to God's people. *A Christian church has a team of shepherds who provide loving pastoral care for every member of the church family.* [Page 99]

25. Godly Men Lead

Incidentally, this and other Bible passages (especially I Tim. 2:11-15) make it clear that women are not called to serve as shepherds, but only certain men. The reason is that the church is God's household, and God's best plan for any house requires godly men to take spiritual responsibility for its welfare. [Page 100]

26. Shepherds Look after Their Heart and Mind

A good shepherd looks after his spiritual condition in two areas: heart and mind. Paul mentioned this to Timothy on another occasion. He wrote, "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (I Tim. 4:16a). Both areas are equally important. For a shepherd to be doctrinally sound but morally loose would be scandalous. But no matter how godly he is, an elder or a pastor who is not orthodox in his theology eventually corrupts the purity of the church. So the Scripture implores the shepherds of God's flock to keep watch over themselves, both ethically and theologically.

27. Leaders Pressured to Compromise

This is difficult to do in post-Christian times. In an age of relativism, church leaders are pressured to compromise their theological views in order to avoid offending anyone, either in side or outside the church. And in an age of narcissism, pastors and elders are constantly encouraged to be selfish-to work for their own profit and to save time for

their own interests. This makes Paul's exhortation as important for twenty-first-century shepherds as ever. Elders and pastors are called to master biblical theology, to spend time studying God's Word and learning the great doctrines of the Christian faith. [Page 101]

28. Doctrinal Error Usually Comes from Leaders

Doctrinal error that leads a church astray almost never arises from the laity, but nearly always comes from the clergy. One of the most likely places for heresy to originate is from the church pulpit or the seminary lectern.

If that is true, then how can the church protect itself from theological error? It is up to the elders-the shepherds of God's flock-who are called to keep watch over the church in doctrine as well as in life. Proper oversight is essential to the moral and doctrinal health of the church. Good shepherds not only distinguish between Christian and non-Christian behavior, but they also discriminate Christian from non-Christian belief. This is why it is so important for pastors and elders to study theology. In order for a congregation to have any hope of preserving its doctrinal purity, its pastors and elders must be defenders of the faith. [Page 107]

29. Theology Connected to Life

Denying the authority of God's Word limits God's claim on our lives. Denying God's full sovereignty increases our anxiety about the future. Denying the uniqueness of salvation in Christ weakens our commitment to missions and evangelism. Denying that justification is by faith alone hinders our assurance of salvation. In each case, theology is connected to life. Ultimately it is for the sake of their sheep that the shepherds of God's flock keep careful watch over the church's doctrine. [Page 108]

Chapter 6. Thinking and Acting Biblically

30. God Wants Our Whole Life

When the Bible tells us to offer ourselves to God, it means our *whole* selves. Many Christians think of their Christianity as an important part of who they are, rather than everything they are. But God wants all of us. He doesn't want to make use of some of our talents; He wants us to dedicate them all to His glory. He doesn't want just a portion of our schedule; He wants us to serve Him all the time. He doesn't want us to give Him a piece of what we own; He wants us to recognize that it's all His stuff anyway. God even wants our bodies, so the Scripture tell us to offer our *bodies* as living sacrifices. [Page 113]

31. Culture Adapts Christianity for Selfish Purposes

David Wells, a keen observer of contemporary culture, explains what happens when people adapt Christianity to suit their own purposes. Such a religion, he writes,

is quite different from the historical Christian faith. It is a smaller thing.... The self is a canvas too narrow, too cramped, to contain the largeness of Christian truth.... Good and evil are reduced to a sense of well-being or its absence, God's place in the world is reduced to the domain of private consciousness, his external acts of redemption are trimmed to fit the experience of personal salvation, his providence in the world diminishes to whatever is necessary to ensure one's having a good day. ... Theology becomes therapy. ... The biblical interest in righteousness is replaced by a search for happiness, holiness by wholeness, truth by feeling, ethics by feeling good about one's self. The world shrinks to the range of personal circumstances; the community of faith shrinks to a circle of personal friends. The past recedes. The Church recedes. The world recedes. All that remains is the self ... a paltry thing.⁷ [Pages 116-117]

32. Think Biblically, Live Biblically

Disciples are called to be different. God's method for training us to follow Christ starts with the renewing of our minds. This is not merely an intellectual exercise. Ideas always have consequences. God transforms our minds with the specific intention of changing our whole lives. First, our thoughts influence our affections, for in time we come to feel what we believe. Then we start to say what we think and do what we think. So the important thing is to get our thinking straight. Then we will know how God wants us to feel and what He wants us to say and to do. Ultimately, it is by thinking biblically that we learn how to live biblically. *Therefore, a Christian church for post-Christian times provides an effective Christian education program to inform, train, and disciple all members of the congregation.* [Pages 123-124]

33. Preaching, Most Important

Churches can set up all kinds of programs to teach people how to love God with all their minds. The most important thing is preaching, the exposition of God's Word. [Page 124]

34. Teach and Train Renewal of the Mind

Every church should have some kind of Bible school program, not only for children, but also for adults. This should include instruction in Bible, theology, church history, and practical Christian living. Children especially should be trained in catechism and Bible memory. When possible and where needed, churches should start their own schools. They should set up libraries and bookstores to introduce people to great Christian literature. Where possible, they should also use radio and the Internet to disseminate biblical teaching. There are many effective ways to teach and train for the renewal of the mind. [Page 125]

35. Go Out as Witnesses

The main work of the church is to prepare those who are being drawn in to then be thrust out into the world as witnesses.... The question is often asked: "How can we recruit more long-term missionaries?" The answer, we believe, is for churches to place greater emphasis on discipling their members, on challenging their members to deny self, to forsake all, and to follow Christ with no conditions or limitations-in other words, to "sell out" to Christ.¹ [Pages 128-129]

36. God Glorified All Over World

Missionary work matters because it is central to God's plan to glorify Himself all over His world. One of the last gifts Jesus gave to the church was a clear, unambiguous statement of its mission to the world. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20a). [Page 129]

37. Our Mission to Tell of Salvation through Christ

Jesus entrusted this royal message to His church. Our mission is to take the good news of the kingdom and to spread it all over the world. Once Jesus died and rose again, the good news got even better. The good news of the gospel is salvation from sin through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see I Cor. 15:4). Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin. Once He was raised from the dead, the free gift of eternal life was His to give away. Now everyone who believes in Jesus receives the forgiveness of sins. Through faith in Christ, we are no longer under condemnation; God's blessings belong to us forever. This is the gospel we proclaim. Our mission is to tell the whole world about salvation through the crucified and risen Christ. [Page 133]

38. Others Saved Falsely through Other Religions

What is most alarming is that religious relativism is starting to come to church. Some so-called evangelicals claim that it is possible for people to be saved without having personal faith in Jesus Christ. Christians have always been concerned about what will happen to people who have never heard the gospel. This concern used to compel Christians to become foreign missionaries; now it seems to make them rethink their theology. In a book called *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*, Clark Pinnock argues that non-Christian religions offer true but partial salvation. Somehow the saving work of Jesus Christ is revealed through other religions. Jesus can save people through Buddhism or Islam as well as through Christianity.

This is not the place to list all the reasons that this kind of religious relativism is biblically and theologically indefensible. However, it is the place to consider its

alarming implications for world missions. Obviously, it makes a tremendous difference whether Muslims can be saved by being good Muslims, or whether they need to come to explicit faith in Jesus Christ. Certainly missionary work would be a good deal easier if people could become Christians without changing religions! This is why some missionaries are tempted to rearrange and reinterpret Christianity to fit the local religious context. Christian contact with other religions sometimes leads to syncretism, in which the gospel is conformed to meet pagan expectations. But Christ does not conform; He confronts. While the gospel must be translated in a way that people in every culture can understand, the good news itself never changes. It is always salvation in Christ *alone*. He is the one and only way to get right with God.

If Jesus saves people through other religions, then why did He commission us to preach the gospel to the whole world, especially when that mission is so dangerous? What is the point of sacrificing everything to tell others about Jesus if trusting Him as the unique Savior of the world is not even necessary for salvation? The truth is that personal faith in Jesus Christ is essential to salvation. Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The phrases that refer to the Savior are exclusive ("no one else," "no other name"), while the phrases that refer the people He saves are inclusive ("under heaven," "given to men"). God has given only one Savior, and He is for everyone. [Pages 134-135]

39. Christ's Entry into National Thought and Action

- One-third of the people in the world today claim to be Christians of one kind or another; however, according to the best estimates, no more than one in ten has genuine faith in Jesus Christ.
- Perhaps three billion people or more have never heard the gospel presented in any form. Estimates vary, but by any measure, the world contains at least 10,000 unreached people groups-cultural communities in which there is no significant Christian presence.
- Some 250 ethnic groups with populations of 10,000 or more do not have any Christian workers planned for them. Not only are they unreached, but there are no plans to reach them. Also, some five hundred people groups are without a church planter.
- Of the more than 6,500 different languages in the world today, more than four thousand do not have any portion of the Bible available.

But beyond these statistics, consider the mission itself, which is to *disciple* the nations (Matt. 28:19). This means much more than simply preaching an evangelistic sermon and then going back home. Missiologist Andrew Walls explains, "Discipling a nation

involves Christ's entry into the nation's thought, the patterns of relationship within that nation, the way the society hangs together, the way decisions are made... National discipleship involves a generational penetration of the ways of thought, the springs of action, the points of reference, of people forming a nation."⁵ By that definition, even nations that have the gospel still need to be disciplined (like the United States of America), to name one. Bringing the peoples of the world under the lordship of Christ will take many years of patient discipleship. [Pages 139-140]

Chapter 8. Serving with Compassion

40. Works of Faith Provide Evidence

To apply the example, when Jesus used the word "for" to connect glory with charity ("Come, take your inheritance, for I was hungry"), He was giving the evidence for His people's salvation rather than explaining its cause. Jesus was not teaching salvation by works. We do not present good deeds to God as our righteousness, but as the fruit of our faith. Our works will either provide evidence of God's gracious work in our lives or they will prove that we have rejected that grace. At the final judgment, our relationship to Christ will be revealed by what we have done-or failed to do-for Him. [Page 154]

41. Compassion Through Service

It is important to understand that the prophecy of the sheep and the goats does not teach salvation by works. However, it is possible to spend so much time explaining what the prophecy doesn't mean that we miss what it *does* mean. What it means is that God wants us to show active compassion through service, because this is one of the surest signs that we have been saved by His grace. How we treat the poor and needy indicates where we stand with God Himself. If we don't care to have a relationship with God, we won't care very much about the needs of the poor. However, if we love God, then we will prove it by loving the least and the lost, for Jesus' sake. Indeed, showing mercy is such an essential mark of being a Christian that Jesus can and will use it as one test of genuine faith. [Page 155]

42. Charity – the Very Heart of Servanthood

Acts of charity are not optional; they are at the very heart of what it means to be a servant of Jesus Christ. This is because, as it says in the mission statement of Bethel Baptist Church in Minneapolis, "the all-satisfying supremacy of God shines most brightly through sacrificial deeds of joyful love." [Page 155]

43. Physical Needs -- Charity

The six acts of charity have several things in common. To begin with, *they all concern physical* needs. Food and water are basic human needs. When these needs go unmet, people die from starvation and dehydration. The stranger needs a place to stay. There were no motels in biblical times, so travelers depended on the kindness of strangers.

Otherwise, they were exposed to the elements and sometimes to personal violence. The naked need clothes; not having them is a sign of extreme poverty. The sick need medical attention to nurse them back to health. Prisoners need the most help of all. Prisons were grim places in the time of Christ, and many inmates depended on friends to bring them food, water, and clothing.

Meeting such physical needs requires a personal investment, which is something else these deeds have in common. A material investment has to be made. It takes money and other resources to give food, to house guests, and to buy clothes. But the investment is also spiritual. It is impossible to care for the needy without knowing who they are, what they need, and how they should be helped. This takes time to figure out. It also takes wisdom, so that instead of always dealing with immediate needs, the deepest spiritual needs of the poor are discerned and addressed. In short, offering mercy means having a relationship that leads from poverty to responsibility. Usually this is the difference between good charity and bad charity. Bad charity throws money at a problem without getting personally involved, with the result that the underlying causes of problems like poverty and homelessness are never dealt with. Good charity makes a total commitment to meeting someone's total needs. [Page 156]

44. God's Test – How We Treat Those Who No One Wants

God's special concern for the disadvantaged runs right through the Bible: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land" (Deut. 15:1 1). "He will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death" (Ps. 72:12-13). "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27). These passages are typical of God's compassion for the underprivileged.

Given this background, it is not surprising that the true test for God's servants is how they treat people whom nobody wants, nobody loves, and nobody touches because they just can't seem to get their act together. Who really cares about the homeless? Or about immigrants who can't speak English? Or about sick, lonely people languishing in a nursing home? Or about people dying from AIDS? Or about criminals locked up in prison? God does, and so should all His servants. [Page 157]

45. Truth and Mercy = God's Love

The church should also show mercy because it confirms the truth of God's Word. The Bible is sufficient to bring salvation. However, when the Word of truth is accompanied by a work of mercy, the powerful, living demonstration of Christ's love has the effect of turning up the volume on the gospel. [Page 158]

46. True Love for Christ

The righteous do not perform the six acts of charity in order to get to heaven. No, what makes their service supremely valuable is that they offer it for Jesus' sake. Love for the poor and the needy expresses true love for Christ. [Page 158]

47. A Need and Personal Commitment

In the same way that Jesus reached out to us, we must reach out to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner. This means reaching out to international students, unwed mothers, homosexuals, people with AIDS, the elderly, inner city children, the jobless, the homeless, the separated and divorced, single parents, the disabled, and the imprisoned. In each of these and many other areas of human need, church members should be on the lookout for people who could use some help, and then under the direction of their pastors, elders, and deacons, organize themselves for effective ministry. This is what mercy requires: both the identification of a need and a personal commitment to meet that need in the compassion of Christ.

48. Good Charity Has Practical Assistance

...bad charity drives out good charity. Good charity offers practical assistance, but at the same time it requires personal accountability. It is the kind of ministry churches can provide by encouraging long-term spiritual change, instead of simply offering short-term help. Bad charity is the kind government programs too often provide: a handout without a hand up. In other words, although material assistance is provided, nothing is done to foster a sense of individual responsibility or to address the structural causes of poverty. [Pages 162-163]

Chapter 9. Why the Church Needs the Gospel

49. A Thoroughly Biblical Model

To live for Christ in post-Christian times, the church must embrace a thoroughly biblical model for everything it does. To this end, a church for the twenty-first century:

- upholds a tradition of strong expository preaching by gifted men of God;
- worships God in a worthy manner through thoughtful words, devoted prayers, and excellent music;
- integrates every member of the congregation into Bible studies and other groups where individual needs can be met and each can minister to others;
- supplies loving pastoral care for each member of the church family;
- provides an effective Christian education program to inform, train, and disciple all members of the congregation;
- advances the missionary work of the church in the local community and throughout the world; and
- serves its congregation and its community through ministries of mercy.

50. The Church Is Best Equipped

This is the biblical pattern for the church. However, it also proves to be exactly the kind of church that is needed for the twenty-first century. One reason for this is that the Bible is God's answer to the problems of relativism and narcissism. It is not surprising, therefore, that a church based on the Bible is perfectly suited to proclaim the gospel in post-Christian times. At every time and in every place, the church that is best equipped to meet people's spiritual needs is a biblical church. [Page 167]

51. Today Christ's Atoning Work to Our Sins

God offers forgiveness for sin through the person and work of Jesus Christ—specifically through His death on the cross. This is something that Jesus did in the past: He died on the cross to atone for sin. That part of His saving work is finished. However, in order for us to be forgiven, we also need Jesus to do something for us now. We need Him to take His atoning work and apply it directly to our sins. God has made provision for the forgiveness of our sin through the present work of Jesus Christ. John wrote, "If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (I John 2: 1b).

52. Christ Defends Us to Receive Forgiveness

Whenever there is any question about our standing before God, Jesus points back to the cross, where He atoned for our sin. "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). This is what Jesus is doing at this very moment: defending us so that we will receive the forgiveness He has promised.

Jesus intercedes for us in all our failures. He intercedes for preachers who, through their own weakness and sin, distort the truth of God's Word. He intercedes for the worshipers who have lost their passion for God's glory. He intercedes for Christians who disturb the peace of the church or who are too selfish to serve. He intercedes for missionaries who have decided to give up their calling. Jesus stands before His Father's throne and says, "Yes, it's all true. They are guilty as charged. But may it please the Court to remember that I have died for their sins:" [Page 176]

53. Church, the City on the Hill

A church can only be a city on a hill if it confesses its sin and trusts in the crucifixion, resurrection, and intercession of Jesus Christ for any hope of salvation. [Page 179]

NOTES

1. The Church In The Twenty-First Century *An Overview*

8. Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 255.

11. Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 88.

2 MAKING GOD'S WORD PLAIN *Expository Preaching*

2. George Gaylord Simpson, quoted in Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law and Education* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 12-13.

5. John Calvin, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 42.

3 GIVING PRAISE TO GOD *Corporate Worship*

2. See Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, [*trans. by* Joyce Main Hanks](#) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

4 GROWING TOGETHER IN GROUPS *Fellowship*

6. Laurent Belsie, "Ethnic Diversity Grows but not Integration," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 March 2001

7. Reaching The World *Missions and Evangelism*

1. Tom and Cynthia Hale, "Disciples Needed for the Twenty-First Century," unpublished letter (used by permission)