

IX. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUL-WINNING, CHURCH-PLANTING AND MISSIONS?

Be Fruitful and Multiply

The Missing Ministry in Today's Churches

I remember on more than one occasion watching slides presented by a missionary to England or Scotland. Invariably, they will show numbers of church buildings that are no longer used for church services. Rather, they are used for flea markets, social clubs and even pubs. Knowing the great heritage we have received from England, I shudder at the sight. It never fails to leave me heartbroken. What happened to the land of our King James Bible; to the land of John Bunyan, William Tyndale, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and Charles Spurgeon? How could things have gone so wrong?

See chart in Appendix C, page VII for the following topic:

Church history, as any history, follows certain identifiable patterns. Bible-believing churches have always gone through times of revival followed by times of steady growth that ended with years of decline. Movements follow the generation of people who live in them. The people of Israel followed the Lord as long as the generation that knew Joshua and had seen the great works of the Lord lived (*Judges 2:7*). But when that generation died (*Judges 2:10*), another generation arose that knew not the Lord and led the Israelites to do evil in the sight of the Lord (*Judges 2:11*).

Generally speaking, a generation is the time it takes for the leaders of a people to be replaced by their children. In the work of God among the churches, the first generation is made up of pioneers. They are the ones who start new churches; who see great revivals; who get things started. They are usually a rough bunch with uncouth ways, but they get the job done.

The second generation is made up of the builders. They take the foundation that has been established by the first generation and build good strong works. This group is a little more polished but they still make a strong stand for the things of the Lord. They live through a time of growth and strength in the Lord's work. The third generation is made up of managers. These men are more interested in holding on to what they have. Their convictions waver. The spiritual strength of the churches begins to decline and so do their numbers.

Most churches now go to a fourth generation made up of traitors to the cause. They end up selling themselves out to a false gospel, a false spirit and a false Christ. The death of the movement is complete with this fourth generation—unless—unless a group in the fourth generation pulls out of the dying movement and starts over again. If this happens, the churches can be renewed again and the work of God can continue to thrive. America has seen great renewal across the land every 60 to 90 years of its existence and smaller times of renewal in-between these: the Great Awakening around 1740; the Second Great Awakening around 1800; the revival of the 1850's; the awakening of the 1920's.

Yet, we are overdue an awakening now. We are instead seeing a great growth in the charismatics, in the cults and in other false representations of the gospel. I have no magical formula for the true churches of today. Truly, we live in an age of apostasy. But all is not lost. Across the world, God is still stirring up revivals and His churches are growing. Please consider with me a crucial area that has been ignored by most Bible-believing churches of today. But first, please look at the present situation of the churches in America. Let me introduce to you four kinds of common churches.

1. **Dying Churches** - As many as 85% of the churches in America are either declining in size or not growing at all. I am not suggesting, as have some, that growth is the supreme goal of the church. Many churches go through trials when growth is not realized for a time. However, just as healthy children naturally grow, so do healthy churches. But what we are seeing is not health but sickness--and that sickness unto death. Each year in America, 4,000 churches shut their doors for the last time. That's 11 churches closing every day of the year. Only 7.5 percent of the people in England go to church on Sunday. Is America far behind? (* Note these statistics come from the early to mid 2000's).

2. **Shadow Churches** - One sign of our times is what I call shadow churches. These churches are shadows of their former selves. They often have huge facilities with just a few people meeting for the services. They often meet in a corner of their auditorium for church and often have entire wings of the building that go unused. Many circumstances bring churches to this point. Perhaps a previous pastor or member tore the church to pieces or perhaps the church over extended in times of seeming prosperity. I do not mean to criticize those who have these churches. Yet, their numbers increase. I am seeing more and more of them. We must ask if this is our future.

3. **Fighting Churches** - As the faithful believers decrease, surviving churches fight over the diminishing turf. Members in one church are encouraged, even enticed, to leave their church so they can come to another. Preachers within congregations are splitting churches just so they can have a ready-made congregation. Pastors are jealous and distrustful of other pastors fearing that someone is after their members. And, of course, they may very well be.

4. **Worldly Churches** - But what about the churches that are flourishing? Unfortunately, most of them have followed the ways of the world. (Though there are

some wonderful exceptions to this rule.) These churches have fallen into the trap of "*supposing that gain is godliness*" (*1 Timothy 6:5*). They have taken their call from the *Church Growth Movement* and built their churches on the marketing methods of Madison Avenue instead of the principles of scripture. They build Family-Life Centers where they can hold jazzercise classes. They play contemporary music in their contemporary services to their contemporary congregations. They entertain with their drama teams and their worship teams and they take trips to Six Flags and the circus. Yet, they compromise holiness and doctrine in order to keep the offerings. These churches are traitors to the truth.

So, while the world goes to hell, we play games. We fiddle while flames destroy our nation. A generation grows up without God; without convictions; without character. In front of our very eyes, our nation becomes the next needy, hardened mission field. Our next generation may see missionaries from the Philippines, from Korea and from China coming to reach us even as we now send missionaries to Great Britain. What are we to do?

Most independent Baptist preachers can quote the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 by heart. They know the importance of reaching and winning souls who are then baptized and built up in the things of God. They also know the importance of missions and quickly quote Acts 1:8 – "*unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" Yet, somehow, they miss the in-between work of church planting. We are so caught up in building our own empires that we fail to do the one work necessary for the continuation of true Christianity in America.

Strangely enough, we insist that our missionaries are not doing their job if they fail to plant churches. Yet, in America, a man can pastor a church for 30 years, never even think of starting another church and still be thought a great success. What makes America so different from every other country on the globe? Why is church planting important there but avoided here?

If you say we already have plenty of churches, I ask, What kind? If you say that church planting is not the responsibility of the individual church, I say, Why not? If you say that you do not have the resources, I say, Who does? In the Philippines, almost every church has from 2 to 10 churches in embryo that they are nurturing. They are usually made up of Bible studies of some sort. These studies may be in a downtown office or in a jungle village, but they often become full-fledged churches in the end. Your financial resources are probably tenfold that of a church your size in the Philippines. Yet, they are doing it and we are not.

How many churches have a row of preachers waiting for the pastor to leave or die or hoping to get their turn in the rotation to preach to the church? These men need to be sent out. They are not trophies to be shown off but workers to be sent out. If they are not ready to pastor, establish a Bible study for them in a neighboring town. How many

church splits have occurred because a young man was not sent out when he should have been? Yes, he was wrong to split the church. But many times the pastor is wrong to hold him back when he should be helping him get started. They are not ready to pastor? Were you ready when you started? Besides, when a young man starts a church, he grows with the church and the Lord sends him as many as he is ready for. This is God's plan and it is the best plan. Let us look at some Biblical reasons for being involved in church planting.

I. The Example of Creation - According to Job, if you look to the beasts of the earth and the wonders of creation, *"they shall teach thee"* (**Job 12:7-8**). On the third day of creation, "the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind" (**Genesis 1:12**). Here we see the very basics of life. Since all things on this earth grow old and die, one of the most essential qualities of life is its ability to reproduce itself. This ability is referred to in the phrase, *"whose seed is in itself"* (**Genesis 1:11**). It had in itself the ability to produce more of itself. The ability to reproduce is necessary for all of God's creatures. Although reproduction is not necessary for an individual rabbit to survive, it is absolutely necessary for the rabbit population. In like manner, one church may survive without reproducing itself but the church population will not survive if churches do not reproduce churches. Just as rabbits are to produce rabbits so Christians are to produce Christians. But this comparison should go further. Godly families should produce godly families; godly men should produce godly men; godly women should produce godly women; preachers should produce preachers. And, yes, churches should be producing churches.

Paul speaks of the church as *"the church of the living God"* (**1 Timothy 3:15**). Churches are living organisms and as such are subject to the characteristics of life. Look at churches and you will see the seven qualities of life in them: organization, metabolism, irritability, growth, reproduction, variation and adaptation. Living creatures are born, they grow, they reproduce, they mature to old age and they die. And just as God's creatures die, so churches die. The church of 50 years that is still hotly pursuing the cause of Christ is rare; much more so the church that is 100 years old. Churches usually do their greatest work in their first 20 to 30 years. By that time—even sooner in most churches—the fire has left and all things have returned to the status quo. Thankfully, there are exceptions to this rule but they are few. Yet, I am not advising the destruction of churches of some age. Mature churches have the experience and the resources to be in the middle of church planting. Mature churches should be headquarters for starting churches all around them. Unfortunately, they usually sit on their resources and slowly die or go liberal in order to keep up with the times.

Churches that do not reproduce other churches are as unnatural as rabbits that do not reproduce rabbits. How about your church? How long has it been since you started another church? What efforts toward planting new churches are you now doing? Do not tell me about your soul-winning program or your missions giving. Those are the beginning and the end of the great commission. But they are not enough. If you are not

planting churches, you have left out the middle ground. Let us look further in the scriptures.

II. The Example of the Early Commissions - When we think of commissions in the Bible, we Baptists naturally think of the Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20*). However, there are many commissions in the word of God. In fact the first commissions give us important information as to how God does His work on earth. A commission is a sending out to perform certain tasks for the one who sent you with the authority and responsibility to perform those tasks. Simply speaking, they are marching orders. Let us consider the first commission recorded in the Bible.

Immediately after creating man, God told him, "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*" (*Genesis 1:28*). After the flood, God gave Noah and his sons a similar commission, "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*" (*Genesis 9:1*). This commission was given in a literal sense to Adam and Noah as a command for them to have children, to multiply their families and to cover the entire earth with their descendents. Yet there is a great spiritual application for us as well.

God told them both to be fruitful and to multiply. For years I thought that these two phrases meant the same thing. However, more recent study has convinced me that God is not just repeating Himself. Children are the fruit of the womb (*Genesis 30:2*). Therefore, to have fruit is to have children. Yet it is possible to have many children and not to multiply. One of the genealogies in Chronicles gives this report: "*And Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his brethren had not many children, neither did all their family multiply, like to the children of Judah*" (*1 Chronicles 4:27*). Shimei had what would be considered to be a large family of 22 children but his family did not multiply. This caused the tribe of Simeon from whom Shimei came to be one of the smaller tribes of Israel. Shimei spent all his energies building up his immediate family and yet failed to multiply the families within his tribe. The result was a decline for his entire tribe.

Do not our churches often do the same thing? They are fruitful in building up themselves to a great size but they do not multiply themselves by establishing other churches around them. Consider again the command given to Noah: "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*" (*Genesis 9:1*). Spiritually speaking, to be fruitful means to win souls and to replenish the earth means to send missionaries around the globe. Therefore, the command to multiply is a command for churches to beget churches.

Do you accept this as part of your commission? If you do not, you follow after the disobedience of the descendents of Noah. You see, as they journeyed from the east, "*they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there*" (*Genesis 11:2*).

They feared that they might “*be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth*” (**Gen. 11:4**). In order to keep everybody together, they built “*a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven*” (**Genesis 11:4**). But this was not God’s will for them. He had told them to multiply and to replenish the earth. He came down and confounded their language so that they could not understand one another. “*So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth*” (**Genesis 11:8**).

God was not pleased when they determined to stay in one place and make “*a name*” (**Genesis 11:4**) for themselves. They refused to multiply and replenish the earth. God was so displeased that He forced them to do what they would not do of their own will. Do we have churches today that refuse to multiply while they work to make a great name for themselves? Please understand. If God blesses a church greatly while they fulfill the great commission ‘(or the commission given them)’ in its entirety, God is certainly pleased with them. However, if a church puts all its energy and effort into building its own name and size, God is certainly not pleased.

Most Bible-believing churches would agree to the importance of soul winning and foreign missions. However, what about regional church planting? How many pastors operate on the fear that they might be scattered abroad? How many churches build “towers” and develop great projects so that they might keep the numbers up and the offerings coming? How much are we going to have to answer to God for our great efforts at building empires while God’s work of planting churches goes undone?

III. The Example of the First Church of Jerusalem – Jesus clearly told His disciples before His ascension, “*ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (**Acts 1:8**). They were commanded to have a simultaneous outreach to their hometown of Jerusalem, to the region of Judaea which surrounded Jerusalem, to the neighboring region of Samaria and to “*the uttermost part of the earth*”.

By being witnesses in Jerusalem, they were to win souls there and establish a local church. In order to be witnesses to Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth, they needed to send out missionaries. However, to be witnesses in Judaea, they needed to plant churches in those locations. Surely, God wants each church to begin in its own location and work to reach surrounding areas and the world with the gospel. I have often heard pastors make a practical application of this verse by comparing their hometown with Jerusalem, Judaea with their state and Samaria with neighboring states. Yet, most of these pastors have never started a church out of their own within a 50 or 100 mile radius of their “Jerusalem”. Most have never even tried.

And, speaking of not trying, consider the church of Jerusalem. They started with “about an hundred and twenty” (**Acts 1:15**) in the church. These waited for “the promise of the Father” (**Acts 1:4**) as they had been commanded to do. That promise came in the form of the baptism with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 1:5; 2:33**). That “*same*

day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Perhaps they could now begin reaching Judaea and Samaria. But they all stayed in Jerusalem.

The church of Jerusalem continued to be blessed and grow. The “*Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).* Could they now begin their outreach to the regions beyond? No, they still remained in Jerusalem. Yet, the revival continued to bring in the harvest. “*Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).* With 5,000 men, the church must have been running from 20,000 to 25,000 by now. Surely this church had the resources to plant other churches and send out church planters. But did they do it? No, they were happy to keep building a bigger and bigger church in Jerusalem.

After the death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying (*Acts 5*), the church stopped growing—“*And of the rest durst no man join himself to them” (Acts 5:13).* Yet, still, no one thought about fulfilling God’s command to be witnesses to the world. Then the church had to deal with internal division and murmuring (*Acts 6*). And, yes, you are right—no one thought to send out church planters.

Finally, after the preaching and stoning of Stephen (*Acts 7*), “*there was great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1).* We see that in Acts 1:8 God told them to go to Judaea and Samaria; in Acts 8:1 He made them go. “*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).* God forced them to do what they failed to do willingly. How much better for them to have simply obeyed God from the first.

Do you see a pattern? The descendants of Noah built the tower of Babel so that they would not be scattered. God came down and scattered them by confusing their languages. The church of Jerusalem kept growing in Jerusalem but refused to go to other regions with the gospel. So, after a time, God allowed persecution to come that forced them to go to other regions. Churches today often refuse to plant churches in their area. Certainly, church splitters are disobedient in their actions and will have to pay for their sins. Yet, is it possible that some churches might not have split in the first place if they would have been willing to multiply?

IV. The Ministry of the Apostle Paul – Paul told the Corinthians, “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1Corinthians 11:1).* Certainly, his life, doctrine and ministry are given to us as a pattern to follow. If we would know what is the work of the ministry of Christ, we should go to the Apostle Paul and learn from him.

How, then, did Paul do the work of spreading the gospel of Christ? In the book of Acts, we see him going from city to city preaching the word, winning the lost and establishing churches. When he left infant churches, he would ordain elders in them and commend them to the Lord (*Acts 14:23*). He would follow this up by returning at a later date and

“confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41). He also wrote letters, or epistles, to deal with problems in the churches and to encourage them in the work of the Lord. In short, he committed his greatest efforts to the planting of churches.

But, you say, Paul was a missionary. Just as an exercise, can you show anyone in the Bible where Paul is called a missionary? I am not saying that our concept of missionaries is entirely wrong. However, we have made too neat a division between the work of a pastor and the work of a missionary; between the work of a local church and the work of missions. Where there should be a seamless cloth, we have created a great gulf.

The work of Christ is to win souls, baptize believers, train disciples, minister to the saints, ordain elders and establish churches. Although the emphasis may be different for different positions in the churches, the work is one continuous whole. The missionary is an extension of the work of a local church. The local church should be establishing other local churches in its own surrounding area. We have taught for too long that **men** start local churches. **Churches** need to be establishing local churches. What worked for the Apostle Paul would work for us today—if we would only do it.

V. The Command to Timothy – Paul wrote two epistles to Timothy, his son in the faith, giving him help and advice for his work in the ministry. Paul wrote Second Timothy shortly before his death as a martyr for the sake of Christ. Immediately before Paul testified that he was ready to be offered and the time of his departure was at hand, he gave this charge to Timothy: *“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (2 Timothy 4:5).*

One of Paul’s most important commands to Timothy was to “do the work of an evangelist”. The word, evangelist, identifies the job as the taking of God’s good news to the lost. Certainly, the work of an evangelist is to lead souls to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Yet, if this is all an evangelist is, we are all called to be evangelists. In order to know the complete work of an evangelist, we should study the scriptures out on the subject.

Since only one man in the Bible is specifically called an evangelist, his work would define the work of an evangelist as to its Biblical definition. In *Acts 21:8*, Paul’s company *“entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven: and abode with him”*. We may speculate about others but we know that Philip was an evangelist. To understand the work of an evangelist we need to study the ministry of Philip the evangelist.

Philip was chosen as one of the seven men full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom to be appointed over the business of ministering to the neglected widows (*Acts 6:1-6*). However, we find Philip first active in the ministry of evangelism after the stoning of Stephen. *“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5)*. Philip goes into an unreached area, preaches the gospel of Christ and gathers

a group of believers there. Though he is not said to have started a church, he certainly laid the groundwork for one.

Later, he was sent by the Lord to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts 8:26-27*). After baptizing the eunuch, "*Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea*" (*Acts 8:40*). This pretty much covers what we know about the work and ministry of Philip the evangelist. His work can be summed up in three activities.

First, he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost (*Acts 8:5, 40*). This is where we get the idea of an evangelist who travels from church to church preaching special meetings in the services. Second, as an evangelist, he actively led lost souls to a saving knowledge of Christ. We see this not only in Samaria, but also in Philip's dealings with the Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts 8:26-39*). He is a personal winner of souls. This aspect of evangelism is often emphasized in messages on the pastor doing "*the work of an evangelist*" (*2 Timothy 4:5*). Third, Philip opened up new areas to the message of the gospel. He pioneered the gospel into areas that did not have an established church. He went to Samaria before others went (*Acts 8:5*) and later "was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (*Acts 8:40*). Therefore, a Biblical evangelist is one who practices all three of these activities.

Therefore, if a pastor is to do the work of an evangelist, he must do more than just win souls. All Christians are to be witnesses to the lost. Also, he must do more than preach. Pastors preach all the time. The command to do the work of an evangelist in 2 Timothy must mean more than win souls or preach. So, what was Paul telling Timothy? If we are right that the primary characteristic of an evangelist is to open up new areas to the gospel as Philip did, then the teaching of 2 Timothy 4:5 becomes very clear.

Pastors are not to be satisfied with ministering to their flock alone. They are to take the gospel to new areas; either to places where Christ is not named or to places where He is not claimed. This may mean setting up a jail ministry or nursing home ministry. However, it should also put every pastor in the church planting business. They should be opening up areas where the scriptures are not preached. This is as much a part of their ministry as anything else they do. Pastors are commanded to do the work of an evangelist. Are you obedient to this command?

Conclusion: Churches are dying all across America. Some are closing their doors. Others are dying spiritually even as they increase in numbers. Much of this is caused by the God-denying spirit of our age. Yet, those who have healthy churches are grasping at what they have with all their strength even as they strangle the very ones they are holding.

We need to return to the early vision of the churches. We need to be fruitful and replenish the earth. But we also need to multiply. We need to take care of Jerusalem and

the uttermost part of the earth. But we also need to minister in Judaea and Samaria. We need to scatter ourselves before we are scattered by God. Individual churches must take the responsibility of multiplying in their own areas. Those of us who are pastors need to do the work of an evangelist.

We are too selfish to send one of our preachers out to start a church. We refuse to give him a family to help him get started—even if they travel forty miles to our church. We are fearful that he might draw our members to his church. We are sure that we need everyone we have in order to survive. But, do we keep everyone? No. We lose people anyway. They go their own way and we find another reason for not multiplying by starting new churches.

We must learn the strength of growing through multiplication. Solomon tells us, “*There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty*” (**Proverbs 11:24**). May we scatter the seed, plant churches and send missionaries around the world. And may God give the increase!