

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

A Paper

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Introduction

In Prov 29:18, King Solomon writes, “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.”¹ Although this verse is referencing more so the issue of morality rather than leadership per se, the general principles involved in its makeup allow for this text to be used in support of a philosophy of ministry. Not only does the prophetic vision convey God’s truth, will, and revelation to his people, but also it simultaneously gives them guidance on how to live appropriately. Thus, it does not suffice to say that the only function of a vision is to provide a goal by which one labors to achieve. Rather, the vision ought to incorporate a goal that can only be reached in terms of a particular lifestyle. This fact is seen from the main idea of Prov 29:18. The void of a prophetic vision, which entails God’s will for his people as well as his absolute truth, leads to moral failure in the lives of his people. This concept is in congruence with v. 18b which compliments the previous clause by pronouncing a blessing upon the one who keeps God’s law. Obedience to the law implies moral fidelity as well as affirming God’s prophetic vision instilled within the Pentateuch (Prov 14:11, 34, 19:11). Therefore, a proper philosophy of ministry should define more than merely the end of one’s service unto God, but instead ought to inform the means by which that purpose is sought. Moreover, a philosophy of ministry must typify a Christian’s lifestyle from beginning to end.

The purpose of this paper is to develop my personal philosophy of ministry in order to specifically and briefly articulate the vision and lifestyle that I perceive to be the

¹Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

fundamental ambition and aim of God's calling upon my life. This paper will accomplish this goal by looking at four main characteristics of a ministerial philosophy: my call to ministry, theological foundations for my ministry, my priorities in ministry, and the role of the local church in my ministry. I label this approach to ministry as "A Biblical-Theological Philosophy of Ministry." The intention of this title is to communicate that the Bible is my primary-authoritative source, theology is the nature of the content which is derived from God's Word, and philosophy hints solely towards the understanding that all of this combined produces a specific attitude and behavior in the way one leads his life, namely in the ministry.

My Call to Ministry

I always had a special affinity for church and church ministry. I distinguish between the two because to me church was a worship service, which by the way I abnormally enjoyed, whereas church ministry included things such as weekly visitation, prayer meetings, going to see the sick and shut-ins, and etc. Even as a young child growing up in a Christian home and into my teenage years, I never rebelled against going to or being a part of church. The only competition for my allegiance to my church family was baseball and horses. By the time I had reached the eighth grade, my life goal was to become a professional baseball player, hopefully for the Atlanta Braves. However, this life-dream changed at the beginning of my eighth grade year at Camden Middle school in Camden, S.C. when I decided to attend the first meeting of the FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes). Because I went to a mid-sized school in a small town, I already knew everyone there so when Jeffrey Graham (FCA head officer at the time) asked if anyone would be willing to give his or her salvation testimony at the next meeting I unashamedly

raised my hand and immediately volunteered.

The next month I sat before peers, friends, and faculty and gave my testimony which was relatively short and unexciting. However, as I prepared to leave the auditorium person after person came up to me and expressed their thanks and shared with me how the Lord used my testimony to minister to them. Up until that time, I had never attempted in trying to encourage people in the Lord and to exhort them in giving their lives to him in a forum as such. I knew after that day this was to be the passion of my life. I wanted God to use me in fulltime ministry, that is as a pastor/preacher, rather than as a Christian baseball player or rodeo star.

From then on out, the Lord began to open major doors of ministry up to me. Subsequent to the meeting where I gave my testimony, the FCA teacher-sponsor, Mrs. Faris, demanded that I become an FCA officer. Then, in my freshman year of high school, my home church pastor, Steve Lee gave me my first opportunity to preach for our church's youth Sunday. The next three or four years while living in Camden I was able to preach numerous times, after learning to play guitar I led worship regularly on Wednesday and Sunday nights, I spoke at several youth rallies and events, and I filled the pulpit at various churches in the community when the pastor was absent. My baseball career ended in the eighth grade, though I continued to take pleasure in training horses and competing in rodeos, my primary concern in life was doing the work of the Lord and preparing myself for fulltime ministry in the pastorate and as a theologian.

Theological Foundations for My Ministry

The two supreme theological foundations for my ministry include the doctrines of God and Scripture. Basically, my philosophy of ministry is informed by who God is

and what his Word says.² The direction of my ministry takes its cue from the nature and content of both of these doctrines and the implications thereof. I begin with the theology of God due the presupposition that anyone who seeks fulltime ministry ought to affirm the inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible as God’s special revelation.

The main issues in laying the theology of God as the first level of groundwork for a philosophy of ministry are the glory of God and the holiness of God. In other words, ministry is impelled by the facts that God is worthy of worship and that God is holy. First, statements such as “*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name (1 Chr 16:29),*” “everyone who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made (Isa 43:7),*” and “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)*” demonstrate that God is worthy of worship and also demands to be worshipped.³ The purpose of creation is to bring glory to the Creator. God’s nature and being entails worship. Therefore, a philosophy of ministry must assume that the correct and chief end of service to God is the glorification of God.⁴

Second, the holiness of God informs a philosophy of ministry insofar as it sets the expectation of the people’s character and lifestyles at the level of God’s nature. The

²Though I am not drawing necessarily from the content of any other particular work, this method of identifying the basic theological foundations to my approach to ministry can be seen in the much more apologetic work of Francis Schaeffer, *He is there and He is not silent*.

³Emphasis added.

⁴John Piper succinctly draws from this premise as the basis of his work on missions, *Let the Nations be Glad*, when he proclaims, “When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions.” John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 17.

Old Testament and New Testament alike testify to this proposition. For example, in Lev 20:26 Yahweh declares, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” Likewise, Peter upholds the same commandment in 1 Pet 1:15-16 when he implores his readers, “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Therefore, the holiness of God demands to be imitated. Hence, a philosophy of ministry should be about exhorting and leading others into lifestyles of holiness after the likeness of their Holy Father (Eph 5:1).

The doctrine of Scripture comes second because there must be a God in existence who ought to be given heed to before one can affirm that he has spoken. However, though the Bible is not intended to be worshipped, it is still affirmed as a divine work. If God speaks, should not he be heard? Better yet, if God commands, should not he be obeyed? Therefore, the doctrine of Scripture forms another level of the groundwork of philosophy of ministry in that it is the only means by which anything can be known about how to please the Holy God of whom glory is due his name. Furthermore apart from a knowledge of Scripture and its contents, people are deprived from a fuller and richer understanding of who God is and what he desires.

Scripture is the primary source of the revelation of God containing his precepts, commandments, will, nature, and gospel. In addition, the Bible testifies to itself in 2 Tim 3:16-17, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” Only from the Bible can people access absolute truth and authoritative information concerning issues such as sin, faith, holiness,

peace, love, spiritual gifts, church conduct and order, salvation, eternal security, eternal destinations, and most of all the gospel of Jesus Christ. A philosophy of ministry must understand the importance and necessity of Scripture in the same vein as Moses did the Law when he declared to the Israelites its connection to their livelihood in Deut 32:47, “For [the law] is no empty word for you, but *your very life . . .*”⁵

My priorities in ministry. Three main areas of concern characterize the emphasis of my ministry: salvation, discipleship, and equipping. First, as in all philosophy of ministries, the salvation of the lost ought to be the foremost priority. Jesus says of his own ministry, “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10).” Moreover, the precedence given to God’s salvation of souls in my philosophy of ministry primarily is grounded upon the Great Commission (Matt 28:19). Making disciples presupposes that people have been regenerated and are now new creations capable of becoming Christ-like (2 Cor 5:17). Therefore, any other spiritual accomplishments whatsoever are utterly dependent upon the true conversion of the soul.

Second, the necessary follow up to regeneration is sanctification. It follows that discipleship is complimentary to salvation. A person cannot be saved and not be a disciple. Salvation and discipleship inextricably go hand-in-hand. In the Great Commission, Jesus plainly commands his followers to “make disciples (Matt 28:19).” This fact entails that a minister’s work is nowhere near complete once a person has confessed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Discipleship is more than a signifier revealing someone’s spiritual inclinations, but rather is a direct connotation disclosing a

⁵Emphasis added.

specific lifestyle that is motivated by God and defined by the Bible. Therefore, Jesus follows up his command to “make disciples” with the instruction “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matt 28:20).” As mentioned earlier, God’s being and his Word not only reveal who he is, but also what he requires. Thus, discipleship is inseparable from salvation because God demands his people to be godly and holy (1 Tim 6:3, 6; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:15-16; 2 Pet 1:3, 3:11). Furthermore, my philosophy of ministry includes the deep desire to see others mature and grow in their desire for and joy in God through constant communion with him.

Third, the equipping aspect of my approach to ministry is intertwined with the work of discipleship. Embedded in the details of teaching and leading people into intimate, holy relationships with the Triune God is educating them on how to reduplicate and multiply the ministry. I develop this point from Paul’s exhortation to the saints at Ephesus in Eph 4:12 “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” From this verse the purpose for equipping the saints is clearly the edification and prosperity of the kingdom of God. However, equipping goes beyond being concerned exclusively to the multiplication of the ministry. This feature also includes equipping the saint himself for the sake of his own spiritual condition. For example, this ministry may include providing a person with sound Christian books for the sake of their personal theology and devotion. In a broader sense, equipping people for the sake of the building up of the body of Christ would comprise of teaching evangelism, imparting sound theology, demonstrating good biblical hermeneutics, offering mission opportunities, explicating apologetic techniques, and so forth. So, my philosophy of ministry is concerned with preparing and training God’s people to be ministers in their

own right as well as doing battle against sin and the evil one in the world (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:12).

The Role of the Local Church in My Ministry

Without the local church, there would be no church. Whether it be a megachurch or a rural church, every communal gathering of the body of believers functions as the local church. Therefore, the local church is an indispensable factor in a philosophy of ministry. In particular, the role of the local church in my ministry is its ability to provide a medium for the proclamation of God's Word. With the desire to preach and pastor, the local church is the proper environment in which this calling may be accomplished.

In addition, the local church is the place where corporate teaching, admonition, exhortation, and worship are made possible. Moreover, the church is the place where God's active ministry is sent forth into the world. For instance, in Acts 2:45 the fellowship of believers was the venue where goods and belongings were sold and distributed to the needy. Or, also in Acts 13:1-3, the church at Antioch was the location of the Holy Spirit's work in prompting that local body to send out Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey. In analogical form, the local church is the regional headquarters for God's ministry on earth. Thus, my philosophy of ministry could be understood as a philosophy of ministry in the church.

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