

The Ministry Philosophy

of

Hope
BIBLE Church



Discover the Dynamics of God's Word

October 2005

The Ministry Philosophy of Hope Bible Church

The central commitment of Hope Bible Church is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. That, ultimately, is *why* we engage in ministry. God establishes and develops local churches as local expressions of the Universal Church, which is Christ's Body and Bride, Christ Himself being her Head. In order to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ we follow the Bible's threefold purpose for the local church (the *what* of our ministry):

- WORSHIP:** To worship God in spirit and truth, praising and thanking Him from our hearts and giving Him all the glory and honor due His name;
- DISCIPLESHIP:** To build up each believer in faith, godliness, and love, motivating the whole body to perform good works and service towards God from a pure heart;
- EVANGELISM:** To reach out to the lost with the Good News about Jesus Christ, speaking the truth in love, calling sinners to turn from their sin and embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Scripture also teaches us *how* those fundamental purposes should be accomplished and what convictions the local church should maintain as it grows and strengthens from generation to generation. This is the basis for the three basic ministries of the local church: the *Ministry of the Word of God*, the *Ministry of Prayer*, and the *Ministry of Christian Fellowship*. Each of these ministries contributes to worship, discipleship, and evangelism, as explained below.

The Ministry of the Word of God

All worship, discipleship, and evangelism must be conducted according to the word of God. The Scriptures must be preached, taught, applied, and proclaimed—regularly, systematically, deeply, practically, and accurately. The Bible instructs believers how to worship God properly, how to grow strong in the Christian faith, and how to be a godly witness to unbelievers. Ignorance of the Bible and its message weakens these three central purposes and therefore weakens the church. The result of a poor commitment to the Scriptures is that the Lord Jesus is not honored the way He deserves. This is why Hope Bible Church is committed to the ministry of the word of God.

WORSHIP

The ministry of the Word of God is critical for Biblical worship, for it is in the Scriptures that God has revealed the truth about Himself and about us. We are able to worship God in spirit and truth only to the extent that we know Him as He has revealed Himself to us in His word.

Expository Preaching on Sunday mornings fosters this. It is preaching designed to bring out the life-changing meaning of the Bible by carefully explaining each passage of Scripture to the listener. An “exposition” of a passage of Scripture is simply an exposing or opening of the meaning of the passage to the hearers. Such a clear exposing of the passage on Sunday morning can occur only if the preacher has first spent the long hours researching the passage in the original languages, discovering its history, context, flow of thought, syntax, style, and meaning. This is called exegesis. Exegesis simply means extracting from the passage the author's intended meaning rather than inserting into the Bible an assumed meaning due to denominational tradition, theological presumption, the pastor's favorite teaching, personal unskilled interpretations, or popular modern teachings.

During the preaching of the message, those same exegetical discoveries must be impressed upon the congregation in a clear, forceful, and relevant way, allowing each person to hear God's word the way the human author and God intended it to be understood. The congregation should be able to understand not only what the preacher is communicating, but the origin of that teaching in the Bible. Only as the listener's mind grasps the meaning of the passage, and is convinced of its correct interpretation, can the will be moved to apply the word correctly to his or her life.

As a spiritual leader, the preacher is to help the congregation see the relevance of each passage of Scripture to modern life (Ephesians 4:11-16). Also, as each Scripture passage is explained, its meaning is impressed upon the church with conviction by the Holy Spirit in order to motivate the congregation to apply the message to their lives. Since all of us are in constant need of reminders, rebukes, exhortations, and corrections, expositional preaching allows us to hear those truths God most emphasizes in His word. In other words, it is the best way to make sure that God—not man—is speaking to the congregation week by week.

Since expository preaching is the only form of preaching that does full justice to the content of the word of God, it is crucial to the spiritual life of the church. Indeed, this is what Paul meant when he commanded Timothy to “preach the word” in 2 Timothy 4:2. To “preach the word” is to preach the meaning of the word accurately and relevantly (2 Timothy 2:15). This type of preaching was the dominant practice of the early church (1 Timothy 4:13). Nehemiah 8:1-8 reveals that expositional preaching and teaching were also practiced in Old Testament times. Even though Jesus often spoke on His own authority and sometimes brought new teaching not found in the Old Testament using parables and conversational teaching, He Himself also modeled for us expositional teaching from the Scriptures on many occasions: Matthew 19:4-6; 22:36-40; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:17-18; 24:44-47. The apostles and early church teachers also wrote expositionally in their letters as they explained the meaning of Christ and the fulfillment of Scripture: John 12:37-41; Acts 7:1-53; Romans 3:9-20; 4:1-12; 9:14-18; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 3:6-14; Hebrews 3:5-19; 1 Peter 2:4-12.

Unfortunately, most churches today, regardless of their denomination, do not practice true expositional teaching and preaching. Some choose not to because they mistakenly think such preaching is irrelevant to the modern church, opting for skits, plays, story telling, humor, and multimedia presentations to entertain people and reach the modern generation. While there certainly is some use for these creative presentations of the Word of God, nothing feeds the sheep in Christ's church better than a constant, thoughtful exposure to the word of God itself. Expositional preaching is more effective in changing lives because it offers more than sound bites and entertainment; it renews the mind and more deeply impacts the soul. It calls on the listener to take his walk with Christ seriously and to be responsible to internalize the word.

There are types of preaching that claim to be expositional but do not fully preach the text. This type of preaching falls short of communicating the full counsel of God. These types of preaching include: using a text of Scripture to launch into a subject unrelated to the text, turning every text into an evangelistic sermon which it was not designed to accomplish, glossing the surface and avoiding the difficulties in the text, reading the text but spending most of the time talking about a favorite subject, telling stories related to the text, speaking eloquently about one topic in the text while avoiding the others, preaching the application of the text without first proving the meaning of the text, and speaking above the text— that is, speaking truth but not carefully explaining where it came from in the Bible.

Some people have wrongly concluded that expositional preaching must always be verse-by-verse. Expositional preaching is really topical preaching because every text of Scripture deals with at least one topic. The topics arising from expositional preaching can be enhanced by a multitude of illustrations, cross references, and applications. There are many different styles of expositional preachers because each preacher brings to the text a unique way of presenting the same material.

God's preparation and gifting of the preacher is also important to the presentation of the word to His people. [For more reading we recommend *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, by John MacArthur and The Master's Seminary faculty (Word Publishers).]

DISCIPLESHIP

Closely related to the ministry of the word through expository preaching is our commitment to discipling each member of the congregation into a growing and fulfilling relationship with Jesus Christ. This commitment to discipleship comes from a desire to help fulfill our Lord's Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, where He commanded the making of disciples in all the earth. All true believers are called "disciples" in Scripture. However, the term "discipleship" has come to refer to the on-going process whereby true believers are helped to mature in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote of the process of discipleship that he practiced and that he wanted the churches to practice. He wrote, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you," (Colossians 3:16). "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also," (2 Timothy 2:2). "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ," (Colossians 1:28). Our discipling incorporates the ministry of the word of God in numerous contexts, such as Systematic Teaching, a detailed Doctrinal Statement, Specialty Instruction, Small Group Discipleship, Family Discipleship, Biblical Counseling, and Leadership Training.

Systematic Teaching takes place during our Sunday morning Bible Training Classes and in Saturday Study Seminars. Like expositional preaching, systematic teaching also seeks to be expositional, but the approach is more interactive and often allows for the presentation of a fuller body of knowledge not appropriate in a sermon format. During systematic instruction the learners are encouraged to share from their knowledge of God's word and ask important questions as they study the material. The teachers gear their instruction to include hands-on training and application. This kind of instruction allows for the use of written materials and charts, and a slow and careful movement through important and often complicated subjects. Classes and courses are often arranged in a systematic way, one class built upon another. (1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11; Colossians 1:28; 1 Timothy 3:2; 4:11; James 3:1)

A Doctrinal Statement is often neglected as a way to minister the word of God to the people of God. Most churches have a doctrinal statement, but the average member of the church knows little about it. It exists not as a teaching tool, but as a means to keep certain false teachings out of the church. Our *What We Teach* was written with the conviction that a doctrinal statement of a church should be a carefully written document that defines what the church believes and actually teaches believers from Scripture. Rather than attempting to achieve unity by minimizing truth, Hope Bible Church seeks to bring about true Spirit-led unity that flows from a careful objective analysis of the Spirit's written word. (John 17:11-23; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 4:6; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:7-9; 2:1-10)

Since our church is nondenominational, and is therefore not restricted to follow any denomination's tradition, we teach from a doctrinal statement that was independently fleshed out through hard exegesis of Scripture. We also had the liberty to borrow from other carefully written confessions and creeds from a variety of denominations and other sources. Though not inspired and not above Scripture, this doctrinal statement gives our church a strong foundation for life and ministry. This *What We Teach* is used to train leaders in the church, challenge newcomers to a greater understanding of the Bible, and extend the message preached in the worship service. To understand further how the doctrinal statement is used in our church, please pick up a copy of *What We Teach* and read it along with its Preamble.

Specialty Instruction: Recognizing that God brings various groups of people to our local church, Hope Bible Church is committed to meeting the teaching needs of those groups. These groups include, but are not limited to, men's and women's groups, those needing parenting and family instruction, Spanish-speakers, youth and singles, and children. Specialty instruction allows the church to isolate particular topics and relevant teaching needed by these different groups in our congregation. Ministry leaders, in touch with their groups, choose topics and present solid Biblical teaching to benefit those in that group. We consider this form of teaching to be supplementary to the other more foundational ministries of teaching. (1 Corinthians 7:1-40; Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 1:28; Titus 2:2-10; 1 John 2:12-14)

Small Group Discipleship complements the preaching and teaching ministry of the church and helps to fulfill the Great Commission. In small groups members can grow in their walk with the Lord through various personal means, including studying God's word with someone who knows them personally in order to ensure that it is being properly applied. Small group discipleship strengthens each member's application of Christ's teachings so that he will mature in the Christian life. It challenges each member to grow in faith and obedience to God's word by relying on the living Christ to produce His character of truth, love, and holiness in Him. Christ-like character in the life of the believer is of utmost importance to God. Knowledge that does not result in greater daily obedience is of no benefit to the believer and never pleases God. Indeed, God's very purpose in salvation is to call out a people from this world to worship Him in spirit and truth, loving Him with all their being and loving their neighbors as themselves. He accomplishes this by recreating us, indwelling us, and then living the new life through us (John 15:1-6). Therefore, the Christian is to be characterized by speaking the truth, walking in love, and abstaining from sin. The Christian is to work at His spiritual growth, disciplining himself in cooperation with the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:17-32; 1 Timothy 4:7-10; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 John 3:3).

Family Discipleship encourages Christian families to be strong testimonies for our Lord in the midst of the sea of sinful and broken homes in our society. Through family-oriented small groups, marriage enrichment, and parenting classes, the word of God is used to build strong marriages and wise parents who fulfill God's distinct role for the family in our world. The Scriptures are also used to honor men and women in the distinct roles given to them by their Creator. Men are to learn to lead their homes in love and patience, and women are to learn the beauty and value of thoughtful submission. Strong churches are not possible without strong families; likewise, families are strengthened by strong churches. Harmonious homes that pass on the wisdom of God from generation to generation are not only possible, but are commanded by our Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78; 127:3-8; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4).

Family discipleship is also enhanced by our commitment to have families worship together on Sunday mornings, and to include the children in small groups. As children worship and learn right along with their parents, their faith and commitment is greatly enhanced. We believe that the most powerful way to influence children for Christ is by having children see their parents' genuine faith at work. Separating families during their participation at church is one of the great mistakes the modern church has made. The number of children in Christian homes who are going the way of the world seems greater than the number embracing a life of commitment to Christ. The way to reverse this trend is to disciple families as the unit God intended them to be, allowing the dad and mom to be the primary spiritual teachers and guides for their children.

Biblical Counseling also depends on ministering the word of God to disciple believers. This ministry seeks to solve man's moral problems solely by the wisdom of God, and not by mixing man's theories with God's answers. By doing this we uphold the best solutions for man, not confusing or weakening people with the speculations of modern man about his problems and needs. God's word applied by the Spirit of God under the sovereign direction of Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father is our sufficient counselor (Psalm 19:7-9; Romans 15:14; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3).

Many churches claim to have Christian counselors and Biblical counseling, yet many who claim so are really providing a mixture of man's psychology and Scriptural truths. Hope Bible Church believes that integrating God's perfect all-wise word with man's sin-tainted ideas is not Christian counseling. It only compromises the power and effectiveness of God's word in our lives. The results have been an unhealthy emphasis on personal fulfillment and self-esteem contrary to the Biblical teachings of repentance from sin, self-denial, humility, and godliness.

Errors in modern-day Christian counseling are abundant and discernment among Christians is not easy to find. Blame for problems is often put on one's upbringing, emotional type, circumstances, or family. In contrast, Biblical counselors understand the implications of the depravity of man, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the meaning of sanctification.

The Bible, either by direct instruction or derived principle, under the illuminating ministry of the Spirit of God, is our all-sufficient teacher. No matter what the problem (unless, for example, it is truly biological in nature), the Bible provides both the correct assessment of the underlying problem (including the distinction between that problem and its symptoms), and the solution to the problem. God will help us with our anxiety, fears, timidity, anger, emotions, lack of self-control, depression, bad habits, lusts, pride, self-image, attention, and motivation if we come humbly to Him through His word believing His promises and activating His principles for living in our lives. The power of Christ in the believer is never to be underestimated by thinking it needs to be supplemented in order to be effective. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for *every* good work," (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Biblical counseling, therefore, is a wise, compassionate application of the word of God to the lives of people who need a more intensive form of discipleship. It is to be done in the context of the local church by men and women filled with the wisdom of God's word.

Leadership Development is another important discipleship ministry in the church. One thing that has hindered the ongoing impact of many churches has been a failure to pass on the torch of ministry to other people, or to do so without adequately training them. On the other hand, ministries that multiply their leadership through discipleship will also multiply their harvest of righteousness. Therefore, we take leadership development seriously at Hope Bible Church. Specifically, we seek to develop and train new leaders in five broad areas: strong Bible study, personal character, family discipleship, theology, and ministry skill (2 Timothy 2:2).

EVANGELISM

Our church is committed to reaching the lost in a God-honoring way, calling men to repent of their sins and embrace Christ as Lord just as Jesus and the apostles practiced in the Bible (Romans 10:9). We believe evangelism is to be accomplished in a manner that demonstrates the greatness of God (Romans 1:16).

Our goal is to involve every member in our church in personal evangelism. Scripture does not leave this responsibility only to those who are gifted in evangelism; rather, they are to help equip the others for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Bringing people to Christ is a supernatural work and must be done by God. No human can save people and lead them into the Body of Christ. Only God can lead people to Himself (John 6:44), give them faith to believe (Ephesians 2:8-9), and grant repentance from sin (Acts 11:18). The word of God is what the Spirit of God uses to impart faith to the spiritually dead and to convict them of their sin (Romans 10:11-17). It must be taught with patience, passion, and clarity. This means that

salvation will not usually come the first time the word of God is spoken to a person. It will usually take time before the unbeliever grasps the gospel. It also means that our evangelism must consist primarily of reading and explaining Scripture. (Note also the role of the ministry of prayer in evangelism, as discussed in that section.)

The godly life of a Christian can powerfully draw unbelievers to Christ. The Scriptures teach that as a person observes the righteous and loving life of a true believer in Christ, God can use that to draw him to repent and embrace the God he sees through that person (Matthew 5:16). However, although the life of Christ as portrayed in the life of a Christian can help lead people to Himself, they must still hear the gospel to be saved (Romans 10:17).

Since the message of the cross of Christ is inherently offensive to many people, it must never be watered down to make it appear more palatable. The watering down of the gospel occurs when churches either make it less central to the message they preach, alter it to be man-centered, (e.g., too much emphasis on improving one's quality of life) or fail to explain the implications of belief in it—such as repenting from sin and obeying the Lord Jesus. Understood this way, many churches that claim not to be compromising the gospel are in fact doing just that.

The Ministry of Prayer

The ministry of prayer works together with the ministry of the word and the ministry of fellowship. Prayer is used by God to impress the Bible's teachings on the heart of His people and to strengthen them for service together. Failure to pray therefore weakens the ministry of God's people and dishonors the Lord Jesus. This is why Hope Bible Church is committed to the ministry of prayer.

WORSHIP

Prayer is central to worship because through prayer we express ourselves directly to God. We are to be praying continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17), even as every aspect of our lives is to be lived as service and worship unto the Lord (Romans 12:1). Corporate worship in the local church is likewise dependent on believing, fervent prayer. Such prayer can take many forms, such as pastoral prayers from the pulpit (reflecting the truths of Scripture that have been read, as well as timely intercessions), silent prayers by the congregation while the pastor prays, and songs of praise, confession, and supplication.

Our church is committed to **God-centered worship** that seeks to keep God central in all our worship services. Much of what is considered worship today is done for man's enjoyment. Our church desires to have worship services that give God enjoyment. Worship is primarily a ministry to God. Worship should be designed to express what God wants to hear from hearts that love Him. Though various forms of worship are allowed and encouraged in Scripture, only those forms that aid the believer to worship in spirit and truth in his own cultural context should be used. Therefore, for example, we incorporate a variety of music styles that clearly enhance the Spirit's worship, rather than those that appeal to fleshly excitement (which would be self-centered worship).

God is the focus of every part of our worship service: the singing of songs, hymns, and spiritual songs; the reading of His word; the silent meditations; the special music; the giving of announcements; the receiving of His message; the prayers offered; giving to God from our time, talent, and treasures; giving testimony of God's work in our lives; sharing in the Lord's Supper; and the closing benediction. We do our best to keep man-centered comments out of our worship service, and to focus our thoughts on the greatness, majesty, holiness, love, and wisdom of our God

and Savior, and our duty to adore Him. (Exodus 20:2-6; 24:1; Deuteronomy 6:13; Psalms 29:2; 33:1-3; 96:9; 99:5,9; 132:7; Matthew 4:9-10; Hebrews 9:1-7; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9)

Our church is also committed to **labor in prayer** for the accomplishment of God's work on earth. God's work must be done with God's tools and His power. Knowing this compels our church to devote ourselves on Sunday mornings, in our small groups, and in our homes to petition God to work His will in our midst.

DISCIPLESHIP

We seek to provide an environment that encourages personal on-going intercessory prayer by every member for the needs of every member in the church. There is no power and progress in Christian ministry apart from a committed, praying people. All the activity in the church is meaningless without the power of God working to transform lives. Prayer is the sign of a people humbled and dependent on God. Prayer requests must reflect the priorities God gives in His word, not simply the worldly desire of people to avoid pain and discomfort in living. As the saints pray together, that also excites and deepens the personal quiet times of each member. (Acts 2:42; Romans 8:26; 12:10-13; Ephesians 6:18-19; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:1, 8; 4:5; James 5:13-18; 1 Peter 4:7)

Small group discipleship fosters that kind of prayer. In small groups members spend time together in prayer in order to bring God's presence and power into the process of discipleship. Likewise, prayer is critical in our families, in our counseling, and in our training, for in every sphere, it is God who works in people's hearts, and He often does so in response to our prayers.

EVANGELISM

Since bringing people to Christ is a supernatural work of God whereby He leads people to Himself, gives them faith to believe, and grants them repentance from sin, and since no human can save people and lead them into the Body of Christ, prayer is absolutely essential if souls are going to come to Christ. No technique can replace the importance of prevailing intercessory prayer in the winning of the lost. Indeed, prayers of faith are the true labor that God uses to bring conversion to the hearts of those He would save. We must talk to God about men before we talk to men about God! Such prayers are sometimes focused on specific individuals whom we ask God to draw to Himself (Romans 10:1). Other times our prayers are more general for the salvation of souls around us and around the world (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Still other times we pray for God to make circumstances conducive to effective evangelism (Colossians 4:3). We also need to pray for boldness in our evangelism (Ephesians 6:19). And, of course, we are in a constant state of prayer as we (or those we are with) are sharing the gospel with others. Apart from prayer, we could very easily be deceived into thinking that people's response to our evangelism depends on our methods and eloquence.

The Ministry of Christian Fellowship

Like the ministry of the word and the ministry of prayer, the ministry of Christian fellowship permeates all that we do as a church. The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*, which refers to our common life together in the local body of believers. Fellowship is too often equated solely with times of food and fun together. Biblically, fellowship is much broader—being reflected in our worship together, our discipling one another, and our evangelism.

WORSHIP

Corporate worship is fellowship. When we all come together to join our voices in praise and thanksgiving to God (Psalm 149:1), when we assemble for the preaching of God's word (Acts 2:42), when we speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19), when we observe the Lord's Supper together (1 Corinthians 11:18-34), when we alert the body of ministry needs and opportunities (Romans 16:1-2), and when we combine our offerings to the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), we are participating in fellowship—the common life of the body. Although corporate worship in a large congregation may involve very little interaction between most of the worshippers (and can therefore allow some people to be isolated from others), there are many opportunities for people to take a more active (rather than passive) role in corporate worship: greeting, ushering, singing, playing musical instruments, giving testimonies, giving announcements, serving as a prayer counselor, etc. Furthermore, times of corporate worship in small groups allow even greater opportunities to participate. God certainly desires that we worship Him alone on a regular, on-going basis. However, He also enjoys, expects, and deserves our corporate worship (Psalm 111:1; 149:1).

DISCIPLESHIP

Through Christian fellowship the members of Hope Bible Church are committed to encouraging one another to obey God. We are committed to forgiving one another and helping one another. Our commitment to one another is taken seriously as we seek to serve one another, work with one another, and enjoy each other in Christian brotherhood. The Membership Covenant of the church stresses our commitment to one another to attend the main activities and commitments of the church and to be devoted to one another in brotherly love. (Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:10; 14:13; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Galatians 5:15, 26; Ephesians 4:25, 32; Colossians 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:25)

To enhance Christian fellowship, we share together in worship, in learning the word, in personal discipleship, and in prayer. We also enjoy sharing meals together. The church also gets together informally for various other purposes. Sometimes a member hosts a party and invites other church families. At other times someone calls for a workday to help a member with repairs or maintenance around the house, or a move. Youth outings are designed to include the whole family while at the same time providing meaningful activities for the teens.

Small group discipleship is particularly geared to fellowship in the broadest sense. In small groups, members can grow in their walk with the Lord through:

- Modeling of the Christian life by a more mature Christian;
- Spending time together in prayer;
- Getting to know each other and deepening relationships;
- Choosing spiritual goals and receiving accountability in order to fulfill the will of God individually;
- Encouraging each other to stay spiritually and rightly motivated;
- Correcting each other so that we recognize what changes need to be made to draw closer to the Lord.

Small group discipleship is the body life in a miniature and more personal form. It is the context in which much of the “one another” commands of Scripture can be carried out (Romans 12:10, 16; 14:19; 15:5-7, 14; 16:16; 1 Corinthians 12:24-25; Galatians 5:13; 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 25, 32; 5:19, 21; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9, 18; 5:11-15; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 5:16; 1 Peter 4:8-10; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12). Indeed, the church is *dynamic*—ever growing and maturing as each member grows in obedience and service to Christ and to His body (Ephesians 4:11-16).

EVANGELISM

Although Hope Bible Church seeks to equip and motivate each member to be an effective witness for Christ among family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc., we also sponsor outreaches that we participate in together. These provide unique opportunities for sharpening and encouraging one another in fellowship, and to be a community of believers amongst unbelievers. Indeed, the corporate witness of the body of Christ is an even greater testimony than the witness of an individual Christian (John 13:35; 17:23).

Unfortunately, a growing number of evangelicals have turned that on its head by viewing the weekly gathering of the saints as the best time to reach out to the lost, who are characterized as “seekers.” However, the Bible consistently portrays the local church as a body of *believers* who gather for corporate worship and discipleship. Biblical evangelism can take place within the local assembly, but it most often occurs *outside* of the assembly in the personal contacts of its members. Since the local church is primarily for believers—not for unbelievers—the church must not be organized entirely (or even substantially) with the unbeliever in mind. In this sense we believe that “seeker churches” have drifted away from the Biblical instruction concerning the nature and purpose of the church. Some provision of hospitality and invitation is necessary, but we must not fashion the church to please the unbeliever. Christ’s church must carry the priorities that God said the church must pursue, including the exposition of God’s word, devotion to prayer, and the fellowship of the saints so that we would worship God more genuinely, disciple one another more fully, and evangelize the lost more effectively. Focusing our services on discipling believers rather than reaching out to unbelievers does not weaken our evangelism. It strengthens it! We do not need to change God’s pattern for church. It works.

The church, therefore, must not try to act less devoted to God or more human-centered to attract unbelievers to Christ. Indeed, this may attract them to the church, but not to Christ. Greater numbers in the church are not desirable if those numbers are not willing to serve and obey Christ from the heart. A strategy that attracts lots of people because of curiosity, intrigue, entertainment, or personal pampering will not yield a pure church. Rather, it will make the application of church discipline (as commanded by Christ) impossible (Matthew 18; 1 Corinthians 5). The methods yielding those results are not biblical or even desirable. Therefore, the principle in evangelism cannot be, “Whatever works should be used.” On the contrary, the method itself must be biblical. Pragmatism and marketing strategies must not be accepted. Obedience to God’s will is the guide.

We teach that the believer must be willing to go to places where the lost are in order to share the gospel with them. The example Christ gave us of associating with the lost illustrated His role as a teacher, healer, and Savior—not as a buddy, partner, or playmate. The believer must pursue the unbeliever as Christ did—not with friendship as the goal, but with the desire to lead him out of his spiritual blindness and unbelief.

Conclusion

A local church’s philosophy of ministry matters! It is not enough to have sound doctrine, as though the Bible is clear about *what* to believe, but is not clear about *how* to implement it personally or in the life of the church. As Paul made clear in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, God gave us the Scriptures not just for sound doctrine, but also to reprove us, to correct us, and to train us in right living “so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for *every* good work.” That is the substance of a church’s philosophy of ministry: putting sound doctrine into practice. And the Scriptures are totally sufficient for that task. There are certainly many aspects of ministry about which the Scriptures allow us freedom to develop forms of ministry that are suited to our culture and era.

However, none of these can be in conflict with the greater commands and principles for ministry that we have attempted to outline in this overview. May we always be humble and teachable to recognize any extent to which our philosophy of ministry departs from Scripture, and to return to the Bible as our handbook for ministry!