

TEACHING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH AT
HANOVER FELLOWSHIP CHURCH,
HANOVER, PENNSYLVANIA

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by
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To Laura

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PREFACE

I count it a privilege to have accomplished my M.Div. and D.Min. studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The faculty not only transmitted information, they conveyed a passion for plumbing the depths of scriptural truth. In particular, my seminar in biblical theology, taught by Dean Russell Moore and Professors James Hamilton and Brian Payne, helped me to connect the dots of the biblical storyline in new and exciting ways.

I am also grateful to the members of Hanover Fellowship Church, where I am proud to serve, for sharing my excitement for biblical theology. They happily participated in the project at hand, believing that our church would become stronger for it. I thank them for the trust and support they have invested in me as their pastor.

Most of all, I thank the Lord for giving me my precious wife, Laura, with whom to share my journey. Her love and encouragement have filled my sails throughout my academic career. As she images God to me, my heart responds in praise to the One who created her and allows me the joy of existing in intimate community. May his glory fill the earth (Num 14:21).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Hanover Fellowship Church with a biblical theological framework for understanding the nature and purpose of the church and their role in it.¹

Goals

This project served to accomplish four goals. The first goal was to increase members' knowledge of the nature and purpose of the church. The content of the eleven-week teaching focused mainly on the spiritual identity of the church *vis-à-vis* the biblical story rather than other ecclesiological aspects such as government and ordinances. Progress toward this goal was evaluated through pre- and post-project factual questionnaires covering material from the course.

The second goal was to increase members' love for the church. By increasing appreciation of the spiritual community of which they are a part, it was presumed that members would have a greater motivation for solving problems when they occur and a higher threshold for leaving the church. A focus group of members was interviewed to determine how their attitudes changed over the course of the project.

¹See definitions section, p. 9, for an explanation of what is meant by the "church."

The third goal was to increase involvement in the church. It was presumed that as people's love for the church and knowledge of its mission increase, their motivation for involvement would increase as well. At the end of the project, an opportunity was given for people to voluntarily enlist in areas of service within the church. An increase of 50 percent in the status quo voluntarism rate was targeted.

The fourth goal was to strengthen and facilitate my own outreach to prospective members. Prior to the project, all prospective members attended a brief new-member orientation or a one-to-one session with me in which I introduced them to the various aspects of Hanover Fellowship Church. I found it very difficult to include sufficient information in those sessions. Also, because the church does not own a facility, it has been difficult to schedule a multi-week new member orientation. By having the sermon messages for this project videotaped and made onto a DVD set, I will be able to give prospective members a much more comprehensive introduction, one that they can watch at their own pace prior to meeting with me for discussion. The benefits of this project will thus continue into the indefinite future.

Ministry Context

Hanover Fellowship Church is situated in Hanover, a fast growing town in south-central Pennsylvania along the edge of the Boston-to-Washington, D.C., corridor. There are currently 53,061 persons living within a five-mile radius of the center of Hanover.² Since 1990 an additional 9,850 people have been added, representing a 22.8

² Demographic data in this paragraph taken from Percept. "FirstView Report for Five-Mile Radius in Hanover, Pennsylvania" [on-line]; accessed 4 February 2009; available from <http://www.link2lead.com/MyCommunity/FirstView/FirstView.aspx>; Internet.

percent increase. The population is expected to grow in the next five years to 55,940, an additional 5.4 percent. Hanoverians are typically Anglo (94 percent), and the major generational groups parallel that of the U.S. average, with Survivors (age 29 to 49) comprising 29 percent of the population, followed by Millennials (age 9 to 28; 25 percent) and Boomers (age 50 to 67; 22 percent). Hanover families are somewhat more traditional than the national average, with 62 percent of adults being married, though they also tend to be less educated, with only 15 percent of those over age 25 being college graduates (the national average is 24 percent).

The religious affections of Hanover residents skew toward mainline, highly liturgical denominations. Of those residents expressing an affiliation with a church, 54 percent identify themselves as Mainline Protestant, 26 percent are Roman Catholic, and 16 percent are Evangelical Protestant.³ Households tend to prefer a “somewhat traditional” church style.⁴

Over the past decade, Hanover has undergone cultural changes due to immigration from Maryland. Many of the new residents enjoy the less expensive housing that Hanover offers but commute long distances to their jobs in Maryland. Hanover natives, meanwhile, have resented the influx of new residents, particularly since they have typically originated from the Baltimore suburbs and have brought with them changes in culture, ethnicity, and crime rates.

³These figures were calculated by combining reported figures from two counties, Adams and York, since Hanover straddles both counties. Association of Religion Data Archives, “County Membership Report: Adams County, Pennsylvania” [on-line]; accessed 4 February 2009; available from http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/counties/42001_2000.asp; Internet. Association of Religion Data Archives. “County Membership Report: York County, Pennsylvania” [on-line]; accessed 4 February 2009; available from http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/counties/42133_2000.asp; Internet.

⁴Percept.

In early 2004, a group of twelve Southern Baptists (formerly from Maryland) attempted to assimilate into the local churches of Hanover but found them to be unwelcoming. The group decided to work with their former church in Maryland to initiate a church planting partnership between the North American Mission Board (which considers the Hanover area a pioneer area with regard to SBC influence), Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, and the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania/South Jersey. Their goal was to form a church which combined sound doctrine and friendliness.

In March 2004, the group chose me to be their pastor. I was in seminary at the time, though I had formerly attended the same Maryland church as the twelve had, and I took over the coordination of the church planting partnership. By September 2004, the group had decided on a name for the church and had begun to operate under the umbrella of the mother church in Maryland. Public worship services commenced at the South Hanover YMCA.

During its first three years, Hanover Fellowship Church experienced steady growth. On the day of its first worship service, 55 people attended. Throughout the first year (meeting only one Sunday per month while I finished seminary) attendance remained steady. Within a few months after weekly worship services began in June 2005, attendance rose to near 80, and a new worship facility was needed.

In November 2005, the church began meeting in the Hanover Movies, a modern sixteen-theater multiplex in the heart of Hanover's shopping district. The theater provided plenty of room for seating as well as a "stage" area in front for preaching and music performance. With the added room and growing enthusiasm, attendance continued to rise, averaging between 110 and 120 in the third year.

Several key elements enabled the rapid growth of Hanover Fellowship Church.

Foremost was the friendliness of the members toward outsiders. Those who visited and became regular attenders reported that they did so largely because of the welcome they experienced. The second key element was the genuineness of the members. The core group chose to dress casually and adopt the slogan, “Real people serving a real God.” I preached expository sermons that made applications relevant to people’s lives. The worship music was contemporary in style and led by a woman gifted with an ability to connect with the congregation.

The third key element was outreach. In the first year of the church, I introduced the members to the concept of servant evangelism and began leading them in “kindness outreaches” within the community. In the summer of our second year, 16 people traveled to Lima, Peru, on the church’s first mission, and the following year 27 people went to Gulfport, Mississippi, to help in the rebuilding in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The fourth key element fueling the church’s rapid growth was conservative orthodoxy. Several people reported that they became members because they heard the Bible preached. Also, the children’s ministry was undergirded by a committed staff of teachers and a strong evangelical curriculum. These aspects became selling points when members invited their friends and neighbors to church.

The fifth key element was excellence in ministry. I set a high standard for the performance of my staff, and they in turn set a high standard for their own teams. Through the delivery of quality teaching and worship experiences, combined with the minimizations of distractions, people could leave a church service feeling that the time had been highly beneficial to them.

During its fourth and fifth years, Hanover Fellowship Church experienced a

decline in attendance. From February 2008 to February 2010 the church lost 48 members while gaining only 18. Based on exit interviews and other written and oral communication from people who had left the church, it was determined that none of the departures indicated a failure in the keys for growth. Instead, they pointed to a variety of unrelated difficulties such as power struggles, interpersonal conflicts, unrepentant sin, lack of involvement, and impatience with growth (one family of four left two months after joining because they wanted more children their kids' ages).⁵

Based on the above analysis, a more systemic problem appears to be that people possess a casual and theologically undeveloped idea of the church. Experiencing a transitory lifestyle (living in a high growth area, moving between towns, attending multiple churches over many years) has lowered people's appreciation for the local church community and reduced the threshold for changing between one community and another. In essence, people have become accustomed to community instability, both in their natural/residential ecology and in their spiritual ecology. Relational conflicts and unmet needs can be expected to occur in healthy churches (no community is perfect), but people have increasingly lost their skills and/or patience with dealing with those phenomena in a productive way. What is needed is to raise the threshold for leaving by enlarging people's vision and appreciation for the spiritual community of which they are a part.

Another contributing factor to the problem is the fact that Hanover Fellowship Church meets in rented facilities. In addition to rental fatigue (the work of setting up and

⁵The interpersonal problems were limited and did not appear to affect friendliness toward outsiders. Visitors continued to rate friendliness as the church's strongest positive asset on the surveys they returned.

tearing down for each week's worship service), this arrangement tends to foster the sense of instability and the impression that Hanover Fellowship Church is still on its way to becoming a "real church." This impression is heightened by being in an area heavily populated with mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations, most of which meet in historic buildings.

The issue of location has become an issue of increasing contention among the members of Hanover Fellowship Church. For its first three years, the church had the feel of novelty and excitement; people in the congregation dreamed of what the church would look like in five years. When the infatuation inevitably wore off, and a church building of their own had not yet been realized, many members began clamoring for progress on this issue. A survey of members found a marked split among attitudes toward buying or building a permanent worship facility; while 58 percent of members were favorable toward it (20 percent strongly favorable; 38 percent weakly favorable), 42 percent were unfavorable (13 percent strongly favorable; 29 percent weakly favorable).⁶ Those who favored moving to a permanent location shared comments on their surveys which indicated that they had an idealized view of what a building could bring: "we could really grow as a church," "we can be a beacon to the community," "visitors can feel more comfortable," "people don't realize we are even here," "more functions, more outreaches." All of these statements appeared to ignore the fact that the church, using rented facilities and homes, had already grown considerably, become a presence in the community, made weekly visitors comfortable, invited friends and neighbors to worship,

⁶Results of a 2008 survey of members of Hanover Fellowship Church. As a result of the interest in finding a permanent facility, a team was created for the purpose of making intentional steps toward this end over the next few years.

and accomplished all the typical activities of building-based churches (e.g., worship services, baptisms, Lord's Supper, prayer meetings, Bible studies, outreach, fellowship events).

Rationale

A biblical theology of the church was needed at Hanover Fellowship Church for several reasons, the first of which is a general need for spiritual growth. One of the biblical roles of a pastor is to edify the body of Christ, pictured in Ephesians 4:11-16 as infants in need of maturation. By teaching a biblical theology of the church, centered on Jesus Christ, the members of Hanover Fellowship Church would be better able to discern true doctrine and to lovingly perform their role in the body. In doing so they would also conform more closely to Christ himself (Eph 4:15).

Second, the spiritually immature members at Hanover Fellowship Church who perceive a building as an evangelism strategy or an otherwise essential part of the body of Christ needed to be educated about the mission of the church. The NT church is a spiritual temple (1 Cor 3:16), built with living persons rather than lifeless bricks (1 Pet 2:5). By teaching a biblical theology of the church, members of Hanover Fellowship Church would be more patient and realistic concerning rented facilities and better equipped to handle a permanent facility when one comes. They would also better understand and more faithfully accomplish the church's mission.

Third, those who might someday experience difficulty within the church community needed to be able to see the church as God does. By teaching a biblical theology of the church, members would appreciate the gift of belonging to the family of God and be more motivated to solve problems than flee them. Their newfound appreciation would have a positive effect on the morale of the entire congregation as the

rate of departures stabilizes.

Fourth, newcomers to Hanover Fellowship Church needed to adequately understand what a church is when they commit to membership. By teaching a biblical theology of the church, and making it available via DVD for future prospective members to view, these people would enter the church as informed members. This teaching would have a proactive, inoculating, effect on the spiritual-social health of new members and enhance their assimilation into the church.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

This project employed a Reformed, redemptive-historical approach to biblical theology. Biblical theology is the discipline which “seeks to identify and understand the Bible’s theological message, that is, what the Bible says about God and God’s relation to all creation, especially to humankind.”⁷ The “father” of Reformed biblical theology is considered to be Geerhardus Vos, the first professor of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary (1894). Holding to the divine authorship and essential unity of the Bible and employing typological interpretation of the OT (reflective of the apostolic pattern of preaching), Vos laid the groundwork for what has come to be known as the “redemptive-historical” school of interpretation, which has been further developed by the work of Reformed scholars such as Edmund Clowney, Derke Bergsma, James Dennison, Sydney Greidanus, Bryan Chapell, and Graeme Goldsworthy.⁸ This school of thought views the Bible as inherently Christ-centered (an extension of the incarnation) which has

⁷James K. Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 2.

⁸See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1975).

the potential to work, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit and God-given faith in the heart of the reader, toward salvation and sanctification. Christ is viewed as the *Mitte der Schrift* (center of Scripture). To understand Scripture accurately, therefore, is to have it applied.

The subject of the biblical-theological study at hand was the church, defined as “the community of true believers for all time.”⁹ This definition describes what is typically referred to as the universal church. In this project, however, application was made to a local church. The distinction between the universal and local church will be maintained and enjoined where necessary.

The project contained a few limitations, the first of which was the inability to fully measure the impact of the project on new member enrollment and retention. Although attitudes toward the church were measured in the immediate post-project phase, changes in enrollment and retention would take months to manifest. Through the use of DVD technology, however, the teaching would continue to benefit prospective members in the years to come.

The second limitation was the inability of this project to impact all the factors which affect enrollment and retention (e.g., quality of programs, adequate staffing, relational connections, conflict resolution). While direct impact on these factors may have been outside the scope of the project, indirect effects were possible. It was hoped that beneficial changes in knowledge and attitude would permeate the organization at all levels and functions.

The third limitation of the study was the difficulty measuring people’s negative

⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853.

attitudes toward the project, church, or researcher. People in the focus group may have been unwilling to voice criticism out of fear of confrontation or because of an expectation that such negativity would be hurtful or unspiritual. Instructions were given to the focus group participants to encourage them to be frank in their assessment.

A fourth limitation was that of selection bias. Focus group participants (i.e., those who participated in both the sermon series and discipleship series) were more likely to be already highly committed to the church. This limitation was taken into account when evaluating the responses of these participants.

The data pool was delimited to contain adults (age fifteen and older), since they tend to be the decision makers in applying for, or resigning, membership. Those participating in the surveys and focus group were required to have attended at least two-thirds of the preaching/teaching sessions. Membership at Hanover Fellowship Church was required due to the content of the course focusing on commitment to the local body.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a biblical and theological rationale for teaching a biblical theology of the church. The content of this chapter will form a curriculum for teaching the members of a local church, with the goal of enlarging people's knowledge of the person and work of Christ *vis a vis* the church and enabling them to properly contextualize their place in salvation history.¹ This chapter will analyze the church on a biblical-theological scale while using three NT passages as launching points. Those three passages will, in turn, serve to frame the main topics: the identity of the church, the nature of the church, and the mission of the church. These topics will be fleshed out conceptually in the form of subtopics.

A major hermeneutical premise of this paper is that the Bible is christocentric, i.e., the central message (*Mitte der Schrift*) of the Bible is not the church but Christ (consistent with the redemptive-historical school of interpretation developed by scholars such as Edmund Clowney, Dennis Johnson, Bryan Chapell, and Graeme Goldsworthy).²

¹Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 16, writes, "One may say that for a Gentile to have a right relation to God he must humbly accept and appreciate a Jewish Book, believe in a Jewish Lord, and be grafted into a Jewish people, thereby taking on their likeness through a commonly shared stock."

²Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002); Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids:

The entire Bible, then, properly interpreted, is the *ῥήματος Χριστοῦ* (Rom 10:17), having the potential to work, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit and God-given faith in the heart of the reader/hearer, toward salvation and sanctification (Eph 4:13).³ Building a compelling biblical theology of the church, therefore, requires solidly anchoring the theology of the church to the more central (and more potent) theology of Christ.

Evidence for the redemptive-historical hermeneutic comes from Jesus himself, who provided the first christocentric biblical theology during the first hours of his post-resurrection ministry as he explained the OT to his disciples (Luke 24:32,44-45). When Jesus said that “the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms” spoke about him (“ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσέως καὶ τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ψαλμοῖς περὶ ἐμοῦ”), he was using a Hebraism which signified the entire OT.⁴ Hence, “the first preaching of the resurrection is Christ’s own exposition of the Old Testament.”⁵

The disciples replicated Jesus’ method when they preached to others. The book of Acts contains many such examples, such as Peter’s speech in Solomon’s portico explicitly linking the suffering of Jesus to OT prophecies (see Acts 3:18, 21, 24), a kerygmatic method known as a “pattern of word fulfillment.”⁶ The author of Hebrews employs typology in interpreting the OT in light of Christ, who is pictured as being the

Baker, 2005); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

³Lee Irons, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” *Kerux* 16 (2001): 42; William D. Dennison, “The Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutic and Preaching,” *Kerux* 21 (2006): 21.

⁴Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 620. All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise specified, are from the English Standard Bible.

⁵Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 30.

⁶*Ibid.*, 31-32.

antitype to Moses (3:1-4:13), Aaron and Melchizedek (4:14-7:28), the OT sacrifices (8:1-10:31), and the patriarchs (10:32-12:17).⁷ It may even be said that *every* OT passage relates to Christ in some way: “In its context, every passage possesses one or more of four redemptive foci. The text may be predictive of the work of Christ, preparatory for the work of Christ, reflective of the work of Christ and/or resultant of the work of Christ.”⁸

When it is considered that the ῥήματος Χριστοῦ is viewed (Rom 10:17; Eph 4:13) as having a powerful and beneficial effect on the hearers (Mounce: “the message itself awakens and makes faith possible”), then a sermon series intended to revitalize a church must be centered on the person and work of Christ.⁹ The people of the church need to realize not just who they are, but who they are *in Christ*. They need to learn not just what their mission is, but how that mission is inextricably bound up *in the work of Christ*. It is the aim of this chapter, then, to expound a biblical theology of the church that is founded upon Christ and thus contains the full potential of power to those who come to understand it.

Identity of the Church: The People of God (1 Pet 2:9-10)

The idea of the people of God is seen throughout Scripture. From Adam and Eve, to Israel, to the NT believers, God chooses people to live under his kingship, brings them into fellowship with him, and uses them to reach the world. Following Israel’s

⁷Also see Rom 5:14 and Col 2:16 for examples of explicit typological statements from Paul.

⁸Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 282.

⁹Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman, 2002), 212. Interestingly, Mounce does not regard ῥήματος Χριστοῦ as being an objective genitive (“the word about Christ”), but a subjective one: “It is Christ himself who speaks when the gospel is proclaimed.”

failure to abide by God's covenantal expectations, Jesus inaugurates a new covenant with the lost sheep of Israel, which forms the core of his ἐκκλησία (“a non-sacral word denoting the gathering of God's people”).¹⁰ Christ's “church” is said to be the new Israel (Gal 6:16), the people of God (Heb 4:9), a community which “embraces all that has gone before, including both Jews and Gentiles.”¹¹ Thus, there is now only one people of God, not two (Eph 2:14-16), and in this people are fulfilled the new covenant prophecies of Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Heb 8:7-13).

To the church the apostle Peter writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:9-10). Here, using several allusions to the OT, Peter identifies the church as the λαὸς θεοῦ with “no awareness or recognition of an ‘old’ Israel, as if they were applicable to Christians alone and had never had any other reference.”¹² The titles of honor used by Peter, broadly biblical in their theological referents, will be helpful in discussing the various subtopics concerning the church as the people of God.

Chosen by God in Christ

Peter's use of the term γένος ἐκλεκτόν in 2:9 echoes the LXX of Isaiah 43:20-

¹⁰J. Gary Millar, “People of God,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 685-87.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 687.

¹²J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 107.

21, τὸ γένος μου τὸ ἐκλεκτόν, and recalls his salutation to the ἐκλεκτοῖς of 1:1.¹³ The community of Christian believers, then, are a race (in a broader sense than mere ethnicity) of elect beings. Peter’s use of γένος ἐκλεκτόν may also hearken back to the same Exodus 19:5-6 passage from which Peter appears to draw his other honorific titles for the church; in the LXX of Exodus 19:5 the Hebrew תְּנִיחָהּ (ESV: “treasured possession”) is rendered λαὸς περιούσιος (as in the full phrase in NETS: “you shall be for me a *people special* above all nations”).¹⁴

From a Reformed perspective the election of Christian believers has been understood as part of the doctrine of salvation.¹⁵ Election is considered to be unconditional, flowing from God’s grace. God’s choice is based on his good pleasure rather than the merits of those he chooses.¹⁶

Through Peter’s appropriation of the OT language of election, then, he is embracing a biblical theology of election that applies to God’s people of all time. The theology of God’s free and gracious initiative reaches back even to the beginning words of creation, “God said, ‘Let there be . . . ,’” and was a fundamental aspect of Israel’s theology.¹⁷ Everything from creation forward, in other words, is viewed as a gift from

¹³Ibid., 108.

¹⁴As noted in D. A. Carson, “1 Peter,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1030; NETS is *New English Translation of the Septuagint* [on-line]; accessed 26 February 2010; available from <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets>; Internet. Italics are mine.

¹⁵See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 669-87.

¹⁶Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 33.

¹⁷James D. G. Dunn, *New Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 74.

God. The election of Abraham, and through him the nation of Israel, is a natural development of this theological foundation.

The apostle Paul rounds out the biblical theology of election with the phrase ἐν αὐτῷ (referring to Christ) in Ephesians 1:4, tying the election of God to the person of Jesus Christ and ruling out overly individualistic interpretations:

[Christian believers'] sense of God's gracious choice of them was inextricably interwoven with their sense of belonging to Christ. God's design for them to be his people had been effected in and through Christ. They saw him as God's Chosen One . . . Indeed, Paul in Gal 3 treats Christ as in a sense fulfilling Israel's election. Christ is the offspring of Abraham *par excellence* (3:16), and in Christ the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles (3:14) so that they too, because they are Christ's, are Abraham's offspring (3:29). The notion of being chosen in Christ here in Ephesians is likely then to include the idea of incorporation into Christ as the representative on whom God's gracious decision was focused.¹⁸

In his recapitulation of Israel's existence, then, Christ actually owns the honorific titles of 1 Peter 2:9-10, in a sense, before believers do. He is the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, and the people for God's own possession. He is the one who was put under a curse (Gal 3:13) and cast off (cf. Matt 27:46) but who ultimately was glorified to the highest place (Phil 2:9-11) for his perfect obedience.¹⁹ The church's special status, therefore, finds its origin in the special status of Christ.

Redeemed by God through Christ

Embedded within Peter's honorific titles for the church are those which speak of its redemption. The terms οὐ λαὸς and οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι are based on the LXX of Hos

¹⁸Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 23.

¹⁹Even the description of Israel as God's special people in Exod 19:3-6 envisioned their need for obedience: "Whereas it was divine will that initiated the relationship, it is the responsibility of the nation to be the people of God by obeying his words and keeping his covenant" (C. Marvin Pate, et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 39).

1:9 and 1:6, respectively, describing the children of Hosea which were named to symbolize God's wrathful stance toward his disobedient covenant people. At the time of Hosea, God was declaring the nation of Israel to be effectively equivalent to the Gentiles. Just as God chose to show mercy on Israel (read: disobedient Gentiles) he also has chosen to love the larger Gentile community of the world.²⁰ There is more than a type/antitype relationship here between Israel and the church; "it may be a meditation on God's great mercy to Jew and Gentile alike, once both are declared to be guilty 'Gentiles.'"²¹

The redemption of God's people takes place through the "lamb of God" Jesus Christ (John 1:29), who in Hebrews 10 is said to embody the perfection of the OT sacrificial system. In this process the church stands with ethnic Israel in seeing the promises of Genesis 12 come to fulfillment in Christ (note that in Genesis 12:3 God predicts a worldwide, not just national, application of the promises). One scholar has coined the term "Evangicalism," from the Greek word for "promise," as a way of describing the single promise-plan of God worked out through Christ to the single people of God (Jews and Gentiles).²² This promise-plan may be seen as the overarching narrative thread of the entire Bible. The church stands not as a replacement for OT Israel but as individuals grafted into the Israel of God (cf. Gal 6:16); through Christ one's earthly ethnic identity has become insignificant. Thus Paul is able to write, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all

²⁰Carson, "1 Peter," 1032.

²¹Ibid.

²²Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 31.

one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:28-29).

Empowered to Worship God by the Spirit of Christ

Peter refers to the church as an ἔθνος ἅγιον ("holy nation"), culling the words from the LXX of Exodus 19:6. The holiness of God's people, whether viewed in terms of OT Israel or the NT church, has two connotations. On the one hand is their identity with (or proximity to) God as their covenant benefactor; their God is one who walks among them (Lev 26:12; cf. 2 Cor 6:16) and so their own dwelling area must be clean (Deut 23:14; cf. 1 Cor 6:18-20). On the other hand, holiness speaks of the conformity of the people to God; they are "set apart for God by the Spirit . . . to be like him in all their conduct."²³ (It is the latter connotation that is in view in this section, as the former will be dealt with on the section considering the nature of the church.)

In regard to behavioral conformity to God, his Spirit can be seen in the OT temporarily coming upon individuals or instructing the nation of Israel.²⁴ The Spirit had an "interior ministry" which had a "sanctifying" effect on God's people.²⁵ The prophets, however, predicted a renewal of the covenant whereby God's Spirit would actually inhabit his people, finally working out obedience through them:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one

²³Michaels, *1 Peter*, 109.

²⁴Clowney, *The Church*, 54.

²⁵James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 25.

teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. . . . (Jer 31:33-34)

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek 36:26-27)

As a result of the cleansing of their “temples” through the work of Christ on the cross, then, NT believers are able to be indwelt by his Spirit and to cry “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15). This opportunity is something God’s people, under their own power, did not have prior to Pentecost and thus marks a discontinuity between the OT-era and NT-era people of God.

Cared for by God in Christ

The final phrase in 1 Peter 2:8-9 to be discussed is λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν (“a people for his own possession”), which echoes the LXX of Isa 43:21, λαόν μου ὃν περιεποιήσαμην (and possibly Exod 19:5 as well). Although Michaels translates the NT Greek as “a people destined for vindication,” the ESV reading is supported by other major English translations (NAS, NKJV, NIV, RSV) as well as lexical sources.²⁶ To be God’s possession is to be in relationship with him: “I will take you for My people, and I will be your God” (Exod 6:7). The Bible uses many different human metaphors to describe God’s caring relationship with his people, including king, father, shepherd, and husband, among others.²⁷ To be God’s possession is also, therefore, to receive his

²⁶Michaels, *1 Peter*, 109; Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “περιποίησις.”

²⁷Cf. John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 368-78.

covenantal provision. Evidence for God's gracious caring of his people spans the entire Bible (cf. the poignant illustration of the king's love for the abandoned child in Ezek 16).

God appears to take it personally when the people of his possession are treated favorably or unfavorably by their neighbors: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse" (Gen 12:3). Thus, Israel's enemies are destroyed while Rahab, who helped the Jewish spies to escape Jericho, is considered worthy of being listed among the faithful in Hebrews 11. In Matthew 25 Jesus includes in the kingdom those who demonstrated love toward "one of the least of these my brothers" (25:40) and eternal fire for those who did not (25:45).

The ultimate provision of God for his people is shown not through earthly sustenance but through the gift of Jesus Christ who reverses the effects of the curses of Genesis 3. Thus we see that the manna of the OT was merely a shadow of Jesus, the true Bread of Life (John 6:35). The true enemies from whom God's people need protection are Satan and his spiritual army (Eph 6:12; 1 Cor 15:24-26; 1 John 3:8). His Spirit gives comfort, hope, and wisdom (Rom 8:16-17; John 14:16ff.). Ultimately a relationship with God, then, is shown to be one where trust and dependence upon Christ transcend one's earthly needs (Phil 4:12-13).

**Nature of the Church:
The Dwelling Place of God (1 Cor 3:16)**

In the early chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the problems of disunity and factionalism he has heard exist among the Corinthian believers. Rather than being oriented toward charismatic human beings (as was typical in Greek culture), Paul exhorts the Corinthians to center their allegiance around Jesus Christ. He warns them that anyone who might so detract from the centrality of Jesus Christ embarks on a dangerous

endeavor, especially in light of the preciousness of the church to God. In underscoring the value and metaphysical reality of the church, Paul issues a remarkable statement: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16).

In the above passage it is clear that Paul is referring to the corporate church.²⁸ He uses ἔστε, which is the second person plural of the Greek word εἰμί, yet he combines it with the singular ναὸς (temple). The plural subject and singular “temple” are also used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16: “For we are the temple of the living God” (to add to the sense that he is speaking here literally, not metaphorically, Paul adds several illustrative OT texts that speak of God’s dwelling place: “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” [quoting Lev 26:11-12]; “Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them . . . and touch no unclean thing” [quoting Isa 52:11]; and “I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me” [likely a reference to 2 Sam 7:14 concerning Israel’s future king who would build the temple]). In sum, God’s people corporately have become his temple, for he dwells in their midst and requires holiness.

Other NT passages refer to the church as the temple of God. In Ephesians 2:21-22 Paul describes individual believers as “being joined together . . . growing into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God [ναὸν ἁγίου] by the Spirit.” Likewise, Peter states that believers as “living stones . . . being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).

²⁸Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 316-17.

Antitype of the Garden of Eden

Gregory Beale has proposed a biblical theology of the temple of God, outlining how this theme encapsulates the story of God's people and their mission from Genesis to Revelation: ". . . The themes of Eden, the temple, God's glorious presence, new creation and the mission of the church are ultimately facets of the same reality!"²⁹ The church as God's temple, in Beale's estimation, is the realization of what was begun in the Garden of Eden. In commanding Adam to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28), God was basically mandating that Adam's mission was to enlarge the dwelling place of God so that God's glory could fill the entire earth.

Beale has developed a compelling argument for the Garden of Eden as a prototypical temple.³⁰ First, Eden was the place where God "walked" among his people, just as he eventually would with Israel (Lev 26:12). Second, Adam was commanded to "cultivate" and "keep" the garden (Hebrew verbs עָבַד and שָׁמַר, respectively), terms that occur together later in the OT in reference to priestly duties at the temple (e.g., Num 3:7-8). Third, the tree of life resembles the future lampstand outside the holy of holies of the temple. Fourth, the wood carvings of the Solomonic temple give it a "garden-like atmosphere." Fifth, both the entrance to Eden and the entrance to the temple faced east. Sixth, both the ark and the tree of knowledge contained wisdom and were deadly to the touch. Seventh, the river that flowed out of Eden sounds similar to the river that was prophesied to flow from the postexilic and eschatological temples. Eighth, just

²⁹Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2004), 11.

³⁰Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 7-10; cf. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 66-80.

as the river is said to flow from the throne of God to a garden in Revelation 22:1-2, Eden might actually be something of a palace dwelling for God, from which the river flows into the garden proper (which Adam was to cultivate). Ninth, the garden of Eden is said in Ezekiel 28:18 to contain “sanctuaries,” and Adam is pictured in priestly clothing (Ezek 28:13).

Antitype of the Tabernacle and Temple of Israel

With the calling of Abraham comes a reiteration of the Adamic mandate of Genesis 1:28. Not only are the words “be fruitful and multiply” repeated verbatim by God to Abraham’s progeny (Gen 35:11-12), but the idea behind Genesis 1:28 can be seen in the covenantal promises to Abraham himself.³¹ God promises to bless Abraham (Gen 12:3), echoing the blessing given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28. God promises to multiply Abraham’s seed (Gen 12:3), repeating the commandment to “multiply” originally given to Adam and Eve. He promises that Abraham’s seed would “possess the gate of their enemies” (Gen 22:17), recalling the mission of Adam and Eve to subdue and rule over the world.

In essence, Israel takes over the priestly duties (cf. Exod 19:6) where Adam failed, and she inherits the mission of enlarging God’s dwelling place (increasing his glory). The tabernacle and temple become a “re-establishment,” in Beale’s words, of the Garden of Eden sanctuary.³² Israel’s temple prefigures, in small scale, the “huge cosmic temple that was to dominate the heavens and earth at the end of time. . . . The Holy of

³¹This comparison is made in Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission,” 13, and idem, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 94-95.

³²Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission,” 15.

Holies represented the invisible heavenly dimension, the Holy Place represented the visible heavens, and the outer courtyard represented the visible sea and earth, where humans lived.”³³ Israel, however, ultimately fails in its mission of spreading the “temple of God’s presence over the whole earth” and suffers the same punishment as Adam—eviction from the garden.³⁴ The problem that hamstrung both Adam and Israel is the same: the corruption of sin (Rom 3:23). The need becomes apparent, then, for a New Adam, an uncorrupted human being, who will finally fulfill the mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Abiding in Christ as the Corporate Temple of God

The Garden of Eden and the temple of Israel ultimately point to Christ as God’s perfect dwelling place. Beale writes, “Christ is the temple toward which all earlier temples looked and which they anticipated.”³⁵ Christ is Immanuel, “God with us” (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). He took on flesh and tabernacled with humanity (John 1:14). He spoke of his body as being the temple of God (John 2:18-21) and of himself as being the “cornerstone” of the temple (Mark 12:10; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17).³⁶ In him are performed all the sacrificial rites of the temple which result in atonement.³⁷

³³Ibid., 16.

³⁴Ibid., 19. Since the physical temple could not conceivably have been enlarged to fill the earth, Beale includes the land of Israel as an extension of the temple, referencing texts that refer to the land of Israel in Edenic terms (Isa 51:3; Joel 2:3; Ezek 36:35) and using terminology such as spreading “the temple of God’s presence.”

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 20.

³⁷It is important to note that when speaking of Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT temple, “this is not spiritualization in our usual sense of the word, but the very opposite. In Christ is realization. It is not so much that Christ fulfills what the temple means; rather Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed” (Edmund P. Clowney, “The Final Temple,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 [1973]: 177).

Along with Christ, all those who unite with him now make up the corporate temple of God. Texts such as John 15:1-7, the metaphor of the vine and the branches, maintain the centrality and headship of Christ in this relationship (cf. Eph 4:15-16; 1 Cor 12:12). There is one Spirit who indwells believers individually and corporately in fulfillment of the new covenant promises of Ezekiel 36:27. In fact, the indwelling ministry of the Spirit is a major aspect of the “newness” of the new covenant:

No longer is worship restricted to one physical location (Deut 12:5). Worship takes place wherever the people of God assemble, for they are His temple (Matt 18:20). No longer must believers pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year (Deut 16:16). Christians have no altars of sacrifice in specific places (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 26:25), and the New Testament does not designate certain locations as “holy places” (Gen 28:17-22). Old covenant believers longed for Jerusalem (Ps 137:5-6) and specifically the temple (Ps 122:1). New covenant believers long for no holy place on earth; they worship wherever God puts them (Acts 14:24-25) and long for Jesus’ return and His heavenly city (2 Tim 4:8; Heb 11:6; Rev 22:17, 20).³⁸

The corporate indwelling of the Spirit has practical implications for the church, one of which is church discipline.³⁹ The body of believers is called to be holy, and unrepentant sin must not be allowed to remain in God’s dwelling place. NT teachings of church discipline recall the OT purity requirements: Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-20 alludes to the requirement of witnesses found in Deuteronomy 19:15 and the expulsion principles found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, while Paul’s instruction to “Purge the evil person from among you” in 1 Corinthians 5:13 directly parallels the LXX of Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7; 21:21; 22:21. In essence, it may be said that the church is called to guard the “garden” as Adam was supposed to do.⁴⁰

³⁸Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 165, a teaching well-suited for churches, such as Hanover Fellowship Church, that may tend to mistake church buildings for God’s dwelling place.

³⁹Ibid., 166-68.

⁴⁰Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 85-87.

Another implication, as suggested by Beale, is the involvement of the church with God's word.⁴¹ In order to increase the presence of God in their lives, believers must heed the example of Adam, who was called to trust God's word (regarding eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) but disobeyed. As Beale asserts, "God's presence will become increasingly manifest to us as we grow by grace in our belief in Christ and his word and by obeying it."⁴²

**Mission of the Church:
To Spread God's Glory throughout
Creation (Matt 28:18-20)**

Although discipline and studying God's Word are important, the primary application of the temple theology from the previous section may be seen in the mission of the church. As the dwelling place of God, the church inherits the Adamic mission to multiply and, hence, to fill the earth with God's glory. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 expresses this mission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The Great Commission, predicated on Christ's authority over all of creation, was about making disciples of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, all the ethnic groups of the world.⁴³ Essentially, then, believers were to be fruitful and multiply themselves by teaching and

⁴¹Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission," 30.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³One would be mistaken to assume that τὰ ἔθνη referred specifically to Gentiles and thus that Jesus was rejecting the Jews in the commission; so Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 431; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 887.

baptizing others into relationship with Christ. As the temple of God's corporate people would expand worldwide, his glory would fill the earth (Num 14:21; Hab 2:14).

Although the Great Commission can be seen in other gospels (Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23), Matthew's characteristically Jewish gospel highlights the idea of the church as the new temple of God. The three main elements of Matthew 28:18-20—the proclamation of authority, the sending of people, and the assurance of divine presence—make it reminiscent of Cyrus' commission to rebuild the temple in 2 Chronicles 36:23, which invites further comparison between the physical temple of Israel and the new temple of the church.⁴⁴ Additionally, if Matthew structured his gospel according to the history of Israel, as some have speculated, then the last words of Matthew are the last words of the Hebrew Scriptures (which ended with Chronicles).⁴⁵

Restored to the Image of God through Christ

Christians are able to successfully accomplish the Adamic mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 because the divine image has been restored to them. This image has always been an essential part of the mission to extend God's dwelling place. As Beale notes, "Adam was created as the image of the divine king to indicate that earth was ruled over by Yahweh In the light of Genesis 1:26-28, this meant the presence of God, which was initially to be limited to the garden temple of Eden, was to be extended throughout the whole earth by his image bearers, as they themselves represented and reflected his

⁴⁴Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 176.

⁴⁵Ibid., 177; Peter J. Leithart, "Jesus as Israel: The Typological Structure of Matthew's Gospel" [on-line]; accessed 9 March 2010; available from <http://www.leithart.com/pdf/jesus-as-israel-the-typological-structure-of-matthew-s-gospel.pdf>; Internet.

glorious presence and attributes.”⁴⁶ The image of God, then, is inextricably linked with the mission of humanity to spread his glory.

The divine image is restored to the church through Christ. In Colossians 1:15 and 2 Corinthians 4:4 Christ is said to be the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, recalling the LXX of Genesis 1:26-27. The author of Hebrews calls him “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature” (Heb 1:3). Jesus himself said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Through the work of the Spirit, therefore, believers, “with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image [Greek εἰκὼν] from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Believers “have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image [εἰκὼν] of its creator” (Col 3:10). They are “predestined to be conformed to the image [εἰκὼν] of his Son” (Rom 8:29).

Reflecting God’s Holiness and Trinitarian Nature

Possessing the divine image means living one’s life as a representative of God.⁴⁷ Moreover, as bearers of the divine image, believers are commissioned by Jesus to multiply themselves by teaching others to obey Jesus: “Teaching obedience to all of Jesus’ commands forms the heart of disciple making.”⁴⁸ Obedience is how the covenant community demonstrates its loyalty to Christ (John 14:15) and is what distinguishes it from the rest of the world: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of

⁴⁶Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 82-83.

⁴⁷Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 132-33.

⁴⁸Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

your former ignorance, 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’” (1 Pet 1:14-16).

When the church obeys Christ, it is reflecting the trinitarian nature of God. Though the persons of the trinity are all fully and equally God, obedience can be seen in the godhead: Jesus obeyed the Father (Phil 2:8; Rom 5:19; Heb 5:8), and the Spirit obeys the Father and the Son (John 16:13-15). Furthermore, the church reflects the trinity of God in its equality of essence amid distinction of roles and its unity amid diversity (John 13:35).⁴⁹

Inheriting the Edenic Mission to Enlarge God’s Dwelling Place

The church stands in a line of missionary work that originated at creation. As has been previously established, Adam and Eve received the mission of filling the earth with God’s glory by populating it with bearers of the divine image, thus enlarging the dwelling place of God among his people. The nation of Israel inherited that mission; they were to accomplish it by bearing “witness to God’s saving presence with her in the past” and “by obeying the Law.”⁵⁰ Thus, Israel’s missionary work was to consist of “testimony in word and obedient deed before the nations to God’s truth.”⁵¹

The church’s mission is “to extend the boundaries of the new garden-temple

⁴⁹Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 131-58.

⁵⁰Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 119.

⁵¹Ibid.; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), also supports the idea that OT Judaism was a missionary religion. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Peter Thomas O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2001), while conceding that Israel was to “mediate [God’s] presence and blessings to the surrounding nations” (252), warn against extending the idea of Great Commission mission to OT Israel: “To contend that Israel had a missionary task and should have engaged in mission as we understand it today goes beyond the evidence. There is no suggestion in the Old Testament that Israel should have engaged in ‘cross-cultural’ or foreign mission” (35).

until Christ returns, when, finally, they will be expanded worldwide.”⁵² The church accomplishes this task through temple-like activities such as reading and listening to God’s Word, praying, and offering sacrifices (e.g., living one’s life in devotion to Christ and being a priest to the nations by sharing the gospel with them).⁵³ The eschatological goal is that the entire cosmos will one day comprise the holy of holies (Rev 21:1-22:5), a fact that the previous physical temples, in microcosmic form, have pointed to all along.⁵⁴

The Means by Which God’s Glory Will Fill the Earth

The church is the means by which God will accomplish his goal of filling the earth with his glory. Where Adam and Israel failed, the church will succeed, due to the empowerment of the indwelling Spirit (Zech 4:6). This success was predicted by Jesus (e.g., Matt 13:31-33; Acts 1:8), but elements of the worldwide spread of the gospel are found throughout the OT. For instance, Solomon’s vast kingdom, along with his wealth and wisdom, which attracted admirers from far away, is a “paradigm for the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion.”⁵⁵ The OT prophets spoke of a day when Israel would be a light to which the world would flock (Isa 60:3; cf. Isa 49:6; 55:5; Zech 8:20; Mic 4:1-2). It is significant, then, that Jesus calls the church the “light of the world” (Matt 5:14), since it is through their agency, i.e., through seeing their good deeds and hearing the word of Christ from them (Rom 10:15-17), that the nations will experience transformation and glorify God (cf. 1 Pet 2:12).

⁵²Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 395.

⁵³Ibid., 396-400.

⁵⁴Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission,” 31.

⁵⁵Kostenberger and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, 252.

Conclusion

This chapter has set forth a curriculum for a preaching series exploring the identity, nature, and mission of the church from a biblical-theological viewpoint. A few closing remarks may be appropriate concerning the rationale for such an approach. Biblical theology is, admittedly, more akin to a ten-thousand feet flyover than a street-level view. At the same time, however, it is distinct from an overly abstracted view produced by systematic theology, which receives input from other disciplines and can tend to consist of proof texts.⁵⁶ Biblical theology, by contrast, stands closer to the text and seeks to understand themes according to the “progressive unfolding of revelation in the history of redemption.”⁵⁷ In addition to progression, biblical theology acknowledges a coherence of subject matter (imbued by the Holy Spirit) among the various genres of biblical texts composed over many generations; in other words, the biblical text is approached as the “one word of God” rather than simply a collection of human products.⁵⁸

Such a high view (and high-level view) of Scripture, centered on the ῥήματος Χριστου, has several benefits. First, it is deemed to be necessary in order for the members of the church to receive the full intended impact of Scripture: “It strives to bring the hearers into a fuller awareness of their position in Christ: already raised with Christ, yet groaning in this present age and longing for the second coming of Christ. . . . United to Christ by means of the text, we live and move and have our being, not in this present evil

⁵⁶For a discussion of the differences between biblical and systematic theology, see Thomas R. Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10 (2006): 20-29.

⁵⁷Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 87.

⁵⁸Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 68.

age which is passing away, but in Christ himself.”⁵⁹ Second, it is necessary for equipping the church with the theological foundation for understanding and appreciating the (often confusing) individual parts of Scripture; the hearers receive guiding principles with which to approach any text for themselves. Third, when preaching “canonically,” pastors avoid the common mistake of treating texts in isolation, which can strip them of their theological meaning and importance, or of moralistic preaching (as every moral imperative is firmly grounded in the indicative of what Christ has done in redemptive history).⁶⁰ In closing, the exhortation of Schreiner is apt:

Our task as preachers is to proclaim the whole counsel of God. We will not fulfill our calling if as preachers we fail to do biblical theology. We may get many compliments from our people from our moral lessons and our illustrations, but we are not faithfully serving our congregations if they do not understand how the whole of scripture points to Christ, and if they do not gain a better understanding from us of the storyline of the Bible. May God help us to be faithful teachers and preachers, so that every person under our charge will be presented perfect in Christ.⁶¹

⁵⁹Irons, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” 41-42.

⁶⁰Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 26; Dennison, “The Redemptive-Historical Hermeneutic and Preaching,” 37.

⁶¹Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 28.

CHAPTER 3

SOLVING THE CHURCH'S ATTRITION PROBLEM

The church as an institution has a public relations problem. As one recent publication put it, “These days, spirituality is hot; religion is not. Community is hip, but the church is lame. Both inside the church and out, organized religion is seen as oppressive, irrelevant, and a waste of time.”¹ Some of this difficulty is to be expected. For instance, by its very nature the church stands as an antagonistic force to the unbelieving world, which is under the influence of Satan and his kingdom (Eph 2:2; Col 1:13; Acts 26:18). The church is enemy territory reclaimed for Christ. It is a “fragrance from death to death” (2 Cor 2:16) to those who are perishing, a witness to their condemnation for having rejected Christ (John 3:18; cf. 15:19). The message of the church appears as “folly” (1 Cor 1:18) to unbelievers because “the things of the Spirit of God . . . are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

Negative perceptions of the church are also held within the believing community. Of the fifty-two percent of Americans who claim affiliation with a Protestant church, roughly half of them attend on any given Sunday.² Younger generations demonstrate an especially negative attitude toward the church. More than two out of

¹Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 13.

²Ibid., 9.

every three young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two drop out of church during those years of their lives.³

Christians avoid church and leave church for a variety of reasons. While personal sin no doubt plays a role in influencing people to avoid or leave church, the church as an institution must examine itself to determine its own culpability in the public relations problem.⁴ Indeed, it is Christ's will that the church be unified (John 17:22-23; Phil 2:2) and that it accomplish its ministry in a manner sensitive to the needs of its members (1 Cor 13:1-3; Gal 6:2; Rom 15:1; Phil 2:3-4), though without compromising its identity, mission, or message (1 Cor 2:2).⁵

This chapter will examine various reasons for dissatisfaction with the contemporary church and explore potential strategies for remedying the situation. While instruction in biblical theology is offered in chapter 2 as a strategy for enhancing satisfaction and commitment, such a strategy is ideally suited for people already within the church who are able to hear the message (versus those who avoid the church altogether). Furthermore, theological instruction may address a lack of knowledge and bring people to greater spiritual maturity in Christ, but its practical implications (i.e., in

³Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 2.

⁴As David Kinnaman, current president of the Barna Group, writes, "We are not responsible for outsiders' decisions, but we are accountable when our actions and attitudes—misrepresenting a holy, just, and loving God—have pushed outsiders away. Often Christianity's negative image reflects real problems, issues that Christians need to own and be accountable to change." David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity . . . And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 14.

⁵This paper views a healthy church as one which is faithful to its biblical identity, mission, and message. Though a healthy church is often a numerically growing one, that is not necessarily always the case. As DeYoung and Kluck assert, "This assumption . . . is alien to the New Testament. . . . There is simply no biblical teaching to indicate that church size is the measure of success" (DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 31).

the forms and methods by which believers relate to one another and accomplish their mission together) must still be articulated and shaped into tangible solutions.

The Problem of Church Perceptions: The Unchurched and Dechurched

This section explores some of the reasons underlying discontentment with the church. Such reasons are understandably different between people who have left the church (the dechurched) and those who have rarely, if ever, attended (the unchurched, also commonly referred to as “outsiders”).⁶ Different reasons for discontentment demand different strategies for remediating it (which will be addressed in later sections).

Why People Avoid the Church

Evangelicals are realizing that “the church must become more reflective and repentant about how outsiders see us.”⁷ In their 2009 book, *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion*, Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck lament the negative perception held by outsiders: “The church, in the eyes of many outsiders, especially the young, is filled with hypocritical, antiwomen, antigay, judgmental, close-minded acolytes for the Republican Party.”⁸ Kinnaman studied a sample of American outsiders ages sixteen to twenty-nine and found that an overwhelming percentage of them held negative perceptions concerning the church: 85 percent felt that Christians are hypocritical, 91 percent characterized Christians as anti-homosexual, and 75 percent said

⁶Rainer defines the “unchurched” as those who have not regularly attended a church for at least ten years. Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched . . . and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 19.

⁷Jim Henderson and Matt Casper, *Jim and Casper Go to Church: Frank Conversation about Faith, Churches, and Well-Meaning Christians* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna Books, 2007), 149.

⁸DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 16.

Christians are too involved in politics.⁹ Outsiders, then, seem to know more about what the church stands *against* than what it stands *for*, and their antagonistic perspective of the church is exacerbated by the evangelical church's alignment with right-wing politics.¹⁰ A sociopolitical reality might in fact underlie this perception: "Since 1980, religious Americans of all faiths—fundamentalist Protestants, observant Catholics, even Orthodox Jews—have been moving towards the Republican Party. At the same time, secular Americans have found a home in the Democratic Party. This is something new in American politics. We have never had a religious party in this country."¹¹

Echoing the above findings, Dan Kimball summarizes the reasons young people (teens and people in their twenties and early thirties) avoid the church as follows:

1. The church is an organized religion with a political agenda
2. The church is judgmental and negative
3. The church is dominated by males and oppresses females
4. The church is homophobic
5. The church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong
6. The church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally¹²

Kimball concludes that the church needs to wake up to the reality that "Christians are now the foreigners in a post-Christian culture."¹³ Kinnaman's Barna survey is consistent with Kimball's findings. He found that the most common labels used to describe the church by young people included "judgmental" (87 percent), "out of touch with reality"

⁹Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 27.

¹⁰Also see Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 43, and Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 77.

¹¹William Schneider, "Politics Remain Stalemated," *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 2002, quoted in Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 183.

¹²Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 69.

¹³*Ibid.*, 30.

(72 percent), “old-fashioned” (78 percent), “insensitive to others” (70 percent), “boring” (68 percent), “not accepting of other faiths” (64 percent), and “confusing” (61 percent).¹⁴

Negative perceptions about the church are also held by the growing movement known as the emergent (or emerging) church. The emergent church views the traditional church as being hungry for political power.¹⁵ Theological concerns also weigh heavily, with the church being depicted as wedded to “enlightenment rationalism” and overconfident in its certainty regarding theological beliefs.¹⁶ Also, to the ears of those in the emergent church, preaching about heaven and hell sounds simple-minded (a form of “fire insurance”) and devoid of a more thoughtful and realized eschatology of the kingdom of God and how it ought to be manifested in one’s daily life.¹⁷ With regard to ecclesiology the traditional church is perceived as prioritizing doctrine over community. According to Belcher, “The emerging church is critical of the traditional view that a person must believe the correct theology before they are welcomed into the church.”¹⁸ The emergent church also views traditional forms of worship and preaching as outdated and having little relevance to those who live in modern culture.¹⁹

Why People Leave the Church

Whereas the previous section explored negative perceptions held by outsiders

¹⁴Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 28.

¹⁵Belcher, *Deep Church*, 43.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 42.

(those who have had little meaningful connection to the church), this section delves into understanding those who were once insiders but who chose to leave their churches. In *Essential Church*, Rainer and Rainer offer insights into this subset of people. They studied eighteen- to thirty-year old Americans who had regularly attended a Protestant church for at least a year during high school but had later dropped out. They found that the top ten reasons why they dropped out of church were as follows:

1. Simply wanted a break from church
2. Church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical
3. Moved to college and stopped attending church
4. Work responsibilities prevented me from attending
5. Moved too far away from the church to continue attending
6. Became too busy though still wanted to attend
7. Didn't feel connected to the people in my church
8. Disagreed with the church's stance on political or social issues
9. Chose to spend more time with friends outside the church
10. Was only going to church to please others²⁰

As can be seen from the list, some reasons for dropping out of church had more to do with the person's lifestyle choices (work obligations, moving far away) than the church itself. However, some reasons offer insights into possible problems endemic to the church. Rainer and Rainer characterized these problems under a single concept: the dropouts simply did not see church as essential to their lives.²¹

According to Rainer and Rainer, "The most glaring issue of estrangement" for dropouts was the vast gulf between their beliefs and that of their church.²² While the pull of secular influences likely plays a role in creating this gulf, the church bears some responsibility for it as well. As the authors put it, "God has converted our children, but

²⁰Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 3-4.

²¹*Ibid.*, 4.

²²*Ibid.*, 30.

we have failed to disciple them.”²³ The authors suggest a lack of intentionality on the part of pastors to preach to youth.²⁴

Rather than a desire for personal freedom or the influence of secular humanism in universities, Rainer and Rainer argue that young people drop out of church because they are not adequately assimilated by the church community in their teenage years: “The best time to assimilate them into the community is the time in their lives when they are the most distant and hardest to engage. The church community must work harder at meeting these teens where they are, lest they lose them to another community outside the church forever.”²⁵ One aspect of meeting the needs of teens is understanding their need to congregate. Rainer and Rainer call this the desire for a “third place,” an informal meeting place outside of home and work where people can congregate. In the absence of the church as a third place, the younger generation turns instead to secular sites such as Starbucks.

A failure in leadership also influences the dropout rate, according to Rainer and Rainer, who write, “This generation of dropouts is looking for guidance from the church. They want the leaders to help shape and mold their lives in a positive fashion.”²⁶ According to the authors, pastors fail the youth by not prioritizing youth ministry (and thereby serving as bad models for the rest of the congregation) and by not relationally connecting with them (in the authors’ view, more from a lack of effort than a true

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 41.

²⁵Ibid., 52.

²⁶Ibid.

inability to relate).²⁷ The failure of leadership is not just on the part of pastors, however. Other adults in the church contribute to the dropout problem by failing to make significant investments in youth. In fact, the highest rate of church dropout is seen among those who have had few or no adults involved in their spiritual development.²⁸

Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck offer a view of the dropout problem based on anecdotal evidence gained through their ministry experiences with young people. They identify four main areas of disillusionment. The first is missiological. Essentially, many view the church as having lost its sense of mission: “Many Christians feel like the church just doesn’t work anymore.”²⁹ The second category of disillusionment is personal. Believers “find the church legalistic, oppressive, and hurtful. The leaders are controlling, the people are phony, and the ministry is programmed to death.”³⁰ Historical reasons comprise the third category of reasons. Christians feel that the first-century church (as an institution) has become distorted beyond recognition through the ages: “According to some disgruntled Christians, the church as we know it is an unbiblical, historical accident at best and a capitulation to paganism at worst.”³¹ The fourth category is theological. Many people believe that “all you need for church is two or three people who worship Christ to be together in the same place. To be a part of a church means nothing more than

²⁷Ibid., 121.

²⁸Ibid., 124.

²⁹DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 16. See also Brian Sanders, *Life After Church: God’s Call to Disillusioned Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 46.

³⁰DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 17.

³¹Ibid.

that we love Jesus and love other people.”³²

Strategies for Increasing Attractiveness

For people to be discipled by the church, they must first come in contact with it (either the institution or individual believers). As part of accomplishing its mission, then, the church should seek to improve its ability to connect with and engage its mission field. This section will discuss strategies for remediating the negative perceptions held by the unchurched and dechurched.

Confronting the disconnect between the church and younger generations seems particularly urgent because the church appears to be losing them: “Not only are the twentysomethings’ pews getting cold, so is our commitment to religion in general.”³³ In fact, the percentage of outsiders is far higher in the younger generations than in the older. Whereas outsiders account for only about one in four persons age forty-two and older in America, more than one-third of those age eighteen to forty-one are outsiders.³⁴

Kinnaman offers six themes to be addressed in combating negative perceptions among young outsiders. First, the church should counteract the perception of hypocrisy. To do this, believers must live more in line with the values they purport to believe (i.e., close the “lifestyle gap”).³⁵ Kinnaman suggests increased transparency, where Christians admit their sinfulness and weaknesses and turn to God for deliverance from their sin.

³²Ibid., 18.

³³Sarah Cunningham, *Dear Church: Letters from a Disillusioned Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 18.

³⁴Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 18. In the sample of sixteen-to-twenty-nine year olds studied, 40 percent were outsiders.

³⁵Ibid., 46.

Second, the church should counteract the perception that Christians are more concerned with converting people than loving them. Kinnaman suggests that Christians become more sincere in their relationships with outsiders (“dynamic, genuine, and real”).³⁶ Such a transformation begins, according to the authors, with a greater yielding of the heart to Christ: “If we are being transformed by our faith, the way we perceive and love people, including outsiders, will change. . . . A deep shift is needed from the sin-altered, me-first, and consumer-minded perspectives that so often plague us as Christians in America. . . . We do not look like Jesus to outsiders because we do not love outsiders as Jesus does.”³⁷ Relational genuineness manifests in large part as listening, which Kinnaman suggests is an important component of evangelism.³⁸

Third, the church should confront the perception that Christians are homophobic by showing “compassion and love to all people, regardless of their lifestyle.”³⁹ Kinnaman suggests that Christians demonstrate their concern regarding homosexuality in helpful, non-political ways (e.g., praying for homosexuals, donating money to organizations which minister to homosexuals).⁴⁰ Other suggested improvements include acknowledging the complexity of the homosexuality issue, cultivating discussions with homosexuals, lessening the church’s reliance on politics as a

³⁶Ibid., 83.

³⁷Ibid., 82.

³⁸Ibid. Listening is also viewed as an evangelism strategy in Henderson and Casper, *Jim and Casper Go to Church*, xxxi-xxxv, in which Henderson argues for the priority of “defending the space” (intentionally cultivating one’s relationship with outsiders) over “defending the faith” (argumentative apologetics). Also see Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, and Doug Pollack, *Irresistible Evangelism: Natural Ways to Open Others to Jesus* (Loveland, Colorado: Group, 2004), 109-10.

³⁹Ibid., 91.

⁴⁰Ibid., 101.

medium for influencing people, dealing tactfully with the issue of homosexual adoption, and having compassion toward homosexuals in words and deeds.⁴¹

Fourth, to counteract the impression that Christians are “boring, unintelligent, old-fashioned, and out of touch with reality,” the church should renew its efforts to engage outsiders and to offer sophisticated responses to the issues outsiders face.⁴²

Kinnaman urges Christians to confront their fear, and possibly even disdain, of outsiders and to seek to be involved in God’s transforming work among them. Christians must be especially diligent not to overlook the loners, self-injurers, and fatherless.⁴³

Fifth, the church should confront the perception that it is too political by taking a more respectful, biblical, and reasoned approach to addressing society’s problems. He writes, “We must ask if our political engagement is Christlike.”⁴⁴ Kinnaman suggests that Christians eliminate militaristic language and attitudes in engaging cultural issues, remembering Paul’s teaching that our battle is with supernatural powers (Eph 6:12).⁴⁵

Sixth, regarding perceived judgmentalism, Christians should cultivate a more positive view of outsiders, picturing them as potential Christ followers. Kinnaman sees

⁴¹Ibid., 104-08.

⁴²Ibid., 121.

⁴³Ibid., 137-39. Cf. Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 140: “Many postmoderns feel as if they are entering an alien culture when encountering evangelical Christianity. It is not the job of the unchurched postmodern to enter our culture. It is our job to invade theirs.”

⁴⁴Ibid., 167.

⁴⁵Ibid., 161. John MacArthur concurs: “When the church takes a stance that emphasizes political activism and social moralizing, it always diverts energy and resources away from evangelization. Such an antagonistic position toward the established secular culture invariably leads believers to feel hostile not only to unsaved government leaders with whom they disagree, but also antagonistic toward the unsaved residents of that culture—neighbors and fellow citizens they ought to love, pray for, and share the gospel with. To me it is unthinkable that we become enemies of the very people we seek to win to Christ, our potential brothers and sisters in the Lord.” John MacArthur, *Why Government Can’t Save You: An Alternative to Political Activism* (Nashville: Word, 2000), 14.

elimination of arrogance and stereotypes as a first step: “Christians continue to harbor prejudices regarding race, age, gender, and intelligence.”⁴⁶ He proposes that Christians listen more to outsiders and attempt to view them as God does.⁴⁷

Rainer and Rainer suggest ways in which the church can become more attractive to outsiders and thereby mitigate the problem of dropouts. In their view, becoming more attractive means getting to the point where the church is perceived as “essential.” “Essential” churches have four components: they learn to simplify (i.e., to streamline their activities based upon a coherent purpose); they move their members into deep truths of Scripture; they have high expectations of their members; and they are committed to multiplication.⁴⁸

Based on his ministry experiences with those in the emergent church, Dan Kimball suggests that churches can improve their attractiveness by befriending outsiders and inviting them into the church so that their negative perceptions might be changed.⁴⁹ The church should make systemic changes as well, in Kimball’s opinion. It should become less hierarchical and seek to bring life and meaning to its rituals.⁵⁰ It should emphasize what it stands for rather than what it is against.⁵¹ More women should be invited into leadership.⁵² Preachers should approach the topic of sexuality in a more

⁴⁶Ibid., 190.

⁴⁷Ibid., 194-95.

⁴⁸Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 6. Simplification is explored in Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B&H, 2006).

⁴⁹Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 236.

⁵⁰Ibid., 92.

⁵¹Ibid., 110.

⁵²Ibid., 123.

thoughtful and sensitive way.⁵³ Members should be more knowledgeable (and less dismissive) about world faiths.⁵⁴ Lastly, all members should be taught proper hermeneutics and ways of sharing their opinions lovingly and respectfully.⁵⁵

Also sympathetic to the concerns of the emergent church is Jim Belcher, who offers a “third way” for the church (i.e., between the traditional and emergent beliefs and practices) to increase its attractiveness. Drawing from the title of his book (*Deep Church*), Belcher suggests several improvements that begin with the word “deep.” The first is “deep truth,” maintaining the church’s belief in objective reality while acknowledging its own epistemological limits (and respecting other traditions as potential sources of knowledge).⁵⁶ The second is “deep evangelism,” where outsiders can be invited into (and belong to) the community (the outer circle) while they wait to decide what they believe about Jesus (a decision which could move them into the inner circle). The third is a “deep gospel,” one that consists of truths which, when internalized, result in community with other believers and acts of mercy which help to reshape society.⁵⁷ Belcher also proposes using more creative arts (deep worship), preaching inductively and gospel-centered (deep preaching), conceiving of the church as both institution and organism (deep ecclesiology), and engaging culture while recognizing its common grace aspects (deep culture).

⁵³Ibid., 150.

⁵⁴Ibid., 171.

⁵⁵Ibid., 206-07.

⁵⁶Belcher, *Deep Church*, 84-85. Belcher describes openness to other traditions as “multiperspectivalism.”

⁵⁷Ibid., 121.

In a study of what attracted unchurched individuals back to the church, Thom Rainer discovered what he called “surprising insights.” At the time of the study, the individuals were attending effective evangelistic churches.⁵⁸ Rainer asked them what attracted them to their current church. Nine out of ten subjects replied that the pastor was key, and a roughly equal percentage mentioned the importance of doctrine.⁵⁹ When pressed about which aspects of the pastor were significant to them, the unchurched pointed primarily to preaching that was informative and applicable to their lives.⁶⁰ Rainer concluded that, despite popular opinion that the unchurched favor watered-down messages, they are actually attracted by meaty preaching: “The formerly unchurched were clear. They not only were interested in learning about doctrine, they were attracted to conservative, evangelical churches that were uncompromising in their beliefs.”⁶¹

Another surprising insight was the importance of friendliness in attracting the unchurched. Forty-nine percent of subjects identified friendliness as a factor which led them to choose their church.⁶² Among the many aspects of the first impression a church makes on a visitor, friendliness stood above all others in importance.⁶³

⁵⁸Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 23. An effective evangelistic church was defined by Rainer as “a church that has at least twenty-six conversions per year and a conversion ratio (membership to annual conversion) of less than 20:1.”

⁵⁹Ibid., 56.

⁶⁰Ibid., 57.

⁶¹Ibid., 127. The importance of doctrine was confirmed by an additional survey of 101 pastors of effective evangelistic churches. Most of these pastors were seminary trained (87 percent), preached expositively, and spent far more time in sermon preparation than a comparison group of pastors.

⁶²Ibid., 56.

⁶³Ibid., 95.

Strategies for Increasing Commitment

In addition to removing barriers to getting in the front door, the church must also seek to close its proverbial back door. The process of assimilation involves turning attenders into productive members (who in turn are less likely to leave). Strategies to assimilate members will be briefly discussed in this section. The list is simply meant to be a sampling of the multitude of strategies in the literature.

Membership Classes

According to Chuck Lawless, “People tend to be much more committed if the church publicly expects them to be committed up front—and a membership class provides a place to communicate these expectations.”⁶⁴ Lawless found that three out of four growing churches he surveyed had membership classes. Those who attended membership classes reported that they benefited by learning what the church expected of them and by getting to know others in the church.⁶⁵ Lawless also suggested the classes were an effective vehicle for getting new members to serve in the church and for recruiting them into small group ministry, activities which are associated with increased commitment.⁶⁶

Thom Rainer studied assimilation in over two thousand churches and concluded that “the relationship between assimilation effectiveness and new members’ classes is amazing.”⁶⁷ Churches that required new members’ classes were far more

⁶⁴Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 32.

⁶⁵Ibid., 19-25.

⁶⁶Ibid., 43, 83-84.

⁶⁷Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 114.

effective at retaining people than those which did not.⁶⁸ Consistent with Lawless' findings, Rainer concluded that new members' classes increase retention because they indicate to people that the church has expectations of them.⁶⁹

Purpose-Driven Church

Writing to pastors in 1995, Rick Warren proposed a model for moving members into ministry based upon the five purposes of the church in the NT: fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism. Warren instructed purpose-driven churches to attract people by meeting their felt needs.⁷⁰ Once attracted, attenders were to be brought into the inner circles of the church through membership covenants, small groups, and increasing levels of membership classes through which they are taught to recognize their spiritual gifts and challenged to use them in service to the church and its purposes.⁷¹

In a similar vein, Rainer and Rainer have proposed that churches simplify around an articulated purpose that includes assimilation of members: "A healthy structure, such as the simple church . . . is designed with intentionality to move members into small groups, Sunday school classes, and ministry groups. In the context of those groups, relationships are formed."⁷² The failure to connect relationally with others, the authors believe, is a structural problem of the church, whereas the by-product of a healthy

⁶⁸Ibid., 114.

⁶⁹Ibid., 115.

⁷⁰Rick Warren, *The Purposed Driven Church: Growing Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 219.

⁷¹Ibid., 370, includes a description of the SHAPE profile.

⁷²Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 145.

structure is that assimilation takes place and people stick with their churches.

Discipleship

Although the Bible indicates that God's will is for believers to attain spiritual maturity (Eph 4:13), some feel that evangelicalism is "distinctly unhelpful when it comes to encouraging a more 'grown up' experience of faith."⁷³ One method of remediating this lack is the multimodal process envisioned by Chuck Lawless for creating "discipled warriors." Lawless pictures discipled warriors as those who are able to stand against the spiritual attacks of the enemy. Discipled warriors are the foundation of a healthy church (i.e., a church which is fulfilling the Great Commission). Lawless' model for discipling contains similarities to the church purposes enumerated by Rick Warren and other writers. Essentially, a church creates discipled warriors through pursuing six E's: exalting God in worship, evangelizing the world, equipping believers, edifying others through ministry, encountering God in prayer, and encouraging one another in fellowship.⁷⁴

What distinguishes Lawless' model from others, though, is that he emphasizes the importance of a biblical-theological foundation for everything that is accomplished in the church. Believers must adequately and accurately know God and understand who they are in him. Lawless writes:

The weakness of the modern church is readily apparent. Church attendance among adults declined in the first half of the 1990s and did not experience significant growth through the latter half of the decade. In many cases membership numbers far exceed actual attendance. . . . At the risk of oversimplifying the issues leading to

⁷³Dave Tomlinson, *The Post Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 24.

⁷⁴Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 31.

this situation, *we simply haven't built a strong biblical foundation*. Churches without a biblical foundation have little to offer to a world searching for purpose.⁷⁵

Missions

Milfred Minatrea defines a missional church to be “a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His kingdom in their world.”⁷⁶ In Minatrea’s view, a missional church is not a church for whom missions is an activity but for whom missions (springing from the *missio dei*) is its very essence.⁷⁷ Every member of such a church is a missionary. Minatrea suggests nine essential practices for missional churches:

1. Have a high threshold for membership
2. Be real, not real religious
3. Teach to obey rather than to know
4. Rewrite worship every week
5. Live apostolically
6. Expect to change the world
7. Order actions according to purpose
8. Measure growth by capacity to release, not retain
9. Place kingdom concerns first⁷⁸

Missional churches increase member commitment by educating, equipping, and enlisting every member in the missionary identity and lifestyle. Minatrea suggests that such endeavors also equip the church as an institution “to navigate the [whitewater] rapids of social and cultural change taking place today.”⁷⁹ Missions becomes the rationale

⁷⁵Ibid., 26-27.

⁷⁶Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), xvi.

⁷⁷Ibid., 11.

⁷⁸Ibid., 27-140.

⁷⁹Ibid., 144.

for every ministry of the church, even the physical structures (which he encourages to be limited).⁸⁰

Minatrea's reasoning is echoed by Rainer and Rainer, for whom multiplication is one of the four aspects of a church that young people can view as "essential." Essential churches are "intentional about multiplying, reaching those who left the church and reaching those who are not Christians and who have never been in church."⁸¹ Missional activity is something that appeals to young people, since "most young adults don't just want more done for *them*. They want to do more for *others*."⁸² In fact, four out of ten young adults who remain in church do so because they believe in the mission and work of the church.⁸³

Servant Evangelism

Helping to accomplish the Great Commission can be an intimidating prospect for many believers. Churches can tend to view evangelism as the exclusive realm of the extroverted. Steve Sjogren has sought to bring evangelism down to the level of the layman through emphasizing acts of kindness that demonstrate God's love in tangible ways. Servant evangelism "is based less on speaking gifts and more on serving gifts."⁸⁴ Sjogren writes, "While only a small percentage of us may picture ourselves as

⁸⁰Ibid., 145.

⁸¹Rainer and Rainer, *Essential Church?*, 234.

⁸²Ibid., 237.

⁸³Ibid., 239.

⁸⁴Steve Sjogren, *One Hundred and One Ways to Reach Your Community* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 11.

prototypical evangelist types, 100 percent of us have gifts of serving.”⁸⁵

Servant evangelism is “demonstrating God’s love by offering to do humble acts of service, in Christ’s name, with no strings attached.”⁸⁶ Typical activities consist of service projects (e.g., washing cars, raking leaves), time projects (e.g., visiting the elderly in a nursing home), and giveaways (e.g., handing out soft drinks at an intersection, serving coffee on a winter day to those waiting in line for an event). These projects, as the above definition implies, are performed free of charge, as this is seen to tangibly exemplify God’s grace.

Servant evangelism has the potential to empower and energize the members of a church to engage their mission field genuinely and confidently. In doing so, it can help to transform the character of the church from “come-and-see” to “go-and-do.”⁸⁷ In a church that actively engages in servant evangelism, belonging becomes synonymous with doing.⁸⁸

Small Groups

In his book, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples through Life Transformation Groups*, Neil Cole writes about what he terms a “grass roots tool for growth.”⁸⁹ His Life Transformation Groups (LTGs) are small (two or three people),

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Sjogren, Ping, and Pollack, *Irresistible Evangelism*, 91.

⁸⁷Steve Sjogren and Rob Lewin, *Community of Kindness: A Refreshing New Approach to Planting and Growing a Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 22.

⁸⁸Ibid., 27.

⁸⁹Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 63.

unisex groups which meet weekly.⁹⁰ Their activities include confession of sin, reading Scripture, and praying for unbelievers. In confession, group members answer pre-written questions such as “Have you given in to addictive behavior this week?” and “Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material or allowed your mind to entertain inappropriate thoughts about someone who is not your spouse this week?”⁹¹ For Scripture reading, participants read twenty-five to thirty chapters of Scripture each week and then discuss them. During the prayer time, participants intercede on behalf of unbelievers using formulaic statements such as “I pray Lord, that You draw _____ to Yourself” and “I ask You to prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth.”⁹²

Rainer concurs that small groups can be an effective means of assimilating members. In his study of the unchurched he found “an overwhelmingly convincing relationship between effective assimilation and involvement in small groups.”⁹³ Sixty-eight percent of those who returned to the church after several years reported that they were involved with a small group (Sunday School was included as a type of small group).⁹⁴ Rainer believes that small groups enhance assimilation by connecting people relationally.⁹⁵

⁹⁰Once a fourth person becomes involved, Cole recommends splitting the group.

⁹¹Ibid., 64.

⁹²Ibid., 69.

⁹³Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 117.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 115.

Mentoring

Dennis McCallum advocates the practice of mentoring or, as he calls it, “organic discipling.” It is organic in that it grows naturally out of relationships rather than from the church hierarchy or programs. The ministry benefits are communicated directly from layperson to layperson rather than via clergy. McCallum’s model of discipling is designed to move people toward spiritual maturity and leadership, a practice he believes is largely missing from the modern church: “The result of this omission is that church-going Christians today often manifest shallow commitment, biblical ignorance, and inability to do advanced Christian ministry.”⁹⁶

McCallum’s model includes several basic components. The first is friendship building, since the relationship is seen to be the vehicle for spurring spiritual growth. A mentor builds friendship by demonstrating Christian love, sharing feelings, and investing time and energy; all the while, however, a careful mentor is assessing for strengths, weaknesses, and points of resistance.⁹⁷ The second component of organic discipling is modeling, since Christian spiritual qualities are “more *caught* than *taught*.”⁹⁸ Mentors build and maintain credibility as models by living in total commitment to Christ.⁹⁹ The mentoring relationship culminates in releasing one’s friend to pursue a life of service to Christ and mentoring of others. Thus, discipling is a synergy between qualitative and quantitative growth tactics. As McCallum writes, “When people buy into the notion

⁹⁶Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipling: Mentoring Others into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Houston: Touch, 2006), 34.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 81-86.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 88, italics original.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 90.

of discipleship, the result is multiplication.”¹⁰⁰

Implications for Ecclesiology

The church has a distinct identity, nature, and mission derived from Christ (see chapter 2) which it must seek to maintain. Its essential ecclesiological aspects must not be compromised in the church’s striving to appeal to the unchurched or to hold on to its members. This section will briefly explore a few cautions based on the aforementioned strategies to increase attractiveness and commitment.

Foundational to a discussion on ecclesiological compromise is acknowledging that outsiders are not necessarily supposed to be attracted to “the things of the Spirit of God” which appear as “foolishness” to them “because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14), as noted in the beginning of this chapter. How far should a modern church go in attempting to appeal to so-called seekers? How can a church service be designed which is both worshipful and evangelistic? Unless the church acknowledges the futility of attracting those who are not moved by the Spirit of God, it runs the risk of accommodating its ecclesiological essentials beyond what is biblically appropriate. For instance, Rick Warren has been criticized for allegedly attempting such accommodation as part of his purpose-driven movement. Bob DeWaay writes, “Warren would like to change the nature of the church and its message so it appears attractive to people as they are in their unregenerate state.”¹⁰¹ DeWaay faults Warren for relying on pragmatism,

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 267.

¹⁰¹Bob DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity: Understanding the Purpose Driven Movement* (Springfield, MO: Twenty-First Century), 2006, 34. In *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Warren states that it is his “deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart” (219).

rather than gospel preaching, for building the church.¹⁰² As DeWaay points out, championing pragmatism is akin to saying that any method, even forced conversions, is acceptable: “In A.D. 800, religion was often spread through warfare. . . . Religion is now spread through marketing.”¹⁰³

Pragmatism, then, cannot be the guiding rule for the strategies enumerated in this chapter. Each method invented by the church for attracting and discipling people must instead be tested against biblical and theological truth (this criterion is explicit in Lawless’ discipling model, which makes it extremely helpful).¹⁰⁴ For instance, is becoming more missional always a good thing? On the contrary, it is good only when the mission is carefully articulated and biblically based. A church which emphasizes social programs but does not preach the gospel distorts biblical eschatology toward an overrealized view.¹⁰⁵ Although its members and community partners might be excited about such endeavors, the church cannot be said to be missional, at least in the biblical sense.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, pragmatism must not be allowed to shape the church’s message. Even if young people feel that getting to heaven is not a compelling issue, the church must nonetheless continue to proclaim the message of Jesus as the “way” to heaven (John

¹⁰²DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity*, 35. In *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Warren writes, “Never criticize what God is blessing, even though it may be a style of ministry that makes you feel uncomfortable” (62).

¹⁰³DeWaay, *Redefining Christianity*, 40.

¹⁰⁴Lawless, *Discipling Warriors*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁵Cf. the view of Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 12.

¹⁰⁶See DeYoung and Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*, 39.

14:6). In responding to the charge that it is legalistic, the church must resist straying toward antinomianism. In an age where intellectual certainty is frowned upon, the church must stand by its message. As MacArthur writes, “The idea that the Christian message should be kept pliable and ambiguous seems especially attractive to young people who are in tune with the culture and in love with the spirit of the age and can’t stand to have authoritative biblical truth applied with precision as a corrective to worldly lifestyles, unholy minds, and ungodly behavior. And the poison of this perspective is being increasingly injected into the evangelical church body.”¹⁰⁷

Lastly, the organization and structure of the church must not fall victim to pragmatism. Even if young people see no need for becoming part of an organized group of Christians, churches must continue to organize biblically, teach the corporate nature of Christ’s body, and advocate for its spiritual benefits. The church must maintain biblical leadership as well, despite popular currents of distrust toward authority. Pastors are needed to preach and teach their congregations in a way that promotes sound doctrine and protects against heresy (contra Neil Cole’s assertion that pastors are a “false priesthood,” i.e., unnecessary “middlemen” between believers and the Word of God).¹⁰⁸ Such a need is derived not from pragmatism but from the Word of God:

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. . . . He [an elder] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. (Titus 1:5-11)

¹⁰⁷John MacArthur, *The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2007), xi.

¹⁰⁸Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 76-77.

And, as is clear from the research, godly leadership and teaching are still strong selling points for the church.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Rainer, *Surprising Insights*, 56-57.

CHAPTER 4

“I BELONG”: A SERIES ON THE CHURCH AND THE BELIEVER’S PLACE IN IT

On August 15, 2010, a two-week preparation period commenced during which I outlined a series of sermon messages and surveyed my congregation on their knowledge of the biblical theology of the church (see Appendix 1). I also began promoting the sermons during the reading of announcements at church on Sunday morning. I wanted the congregation to expect that a major move of the Lord was about to happen in our midst. I encouraged the congregation with the thought that once they fully grasped the biblical picture of the church, it could be transformative for them individually and as a church.

Pre-project Questionnaires

During the preparation period I distributed the pre-project questionnaires to members of Hanover Fellowship Church fifteen years of age or older (for reasons detailed in chapter 1). I estimated the questionnaire would require between 15 and 25 minutes to complete, so I allowed participants to take the questionnaires home and return them the following week. I reassured members that participation in the questionnaire phase was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous.

Out of an estimated 35 questionnaires distributed, 23 were completed and handed back to me. Whereas Table A1 in Appendix 2 details the types of responses obtained to each question, in Table 1 I have grouped the questions according to four main

knowledge categories in order to facilitate a discussion on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the congregation's pre-project knowledge.

Table 1. Pre-project questionnaire responses

Category/question	Correct responses (%)
Nature of the church	
1. Which of the following statements best describes the church?	91
2. The New Testament most often talks about the temple of God being . . .	35
7. The Biblical word for "church" refers to the:	91
12. The following are all described as God's dwelling place in the Bible except:	96
Mission of the church	
3. When we love the members in our church we are:	65
11. The words "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" may be found in the book of:	78
15. The Bible teaches that believers are given gifts from the Holy Spirit primarily for their own benefit	100
Relationship between the church and creation	
4. Whom did God command to multiply and fill the earth?	65
5. To possess the image of God is primarily to:	39
8. The mission to enlarge God's dwelling place was first addressed to:	52
9. The word that best describes God's purpose for creation is:	87
13. The Bible teaches that God created humans to provide himself company	78
God's preferential love for the church	
6. To be "elect" means:	96
10. When Jesus refers to acts of service toward the "least of these" he means:	4
14. The Bible teaches that God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world	35

Note: Categories (e.g., "Nature of the church") are *post hoc* approximations of the conceptual similarities among questions. The questionnaire was not designed with these categories in mind.

Based on Table 1, the congregation appeared to have a firm grasp on the nature of the church. A large percentage of respondents (91 percent) accurately described the relationship between Israel and the church by choosing the statement “the church is part of the same covenant and promises that God made with Israel.”¹ Large majorities of respondents also correctly associated the biblical word “church” with people (91 percent) and eliminated “church building” from the list of items classified as God’s dwelling place (96 percent). Only 35 percent, however, saw the NT term “temple” as most commonly referring to the corporate church; most people responded that it was the individual believer.²

The congregation appeared strong in their knowledge of the church’s mission. Sixty-five percent understood that loving fellow church members equates to loving Christ, demonstrating God’s trinitarian nature, and proclaiming the gospel. Seventy-eight percent knew that the Great Commission is found in Matthew. All respondents understood that it was false to say that spiritual gifts are primarily for individual benefit.

Response accuracy was mixed for questions concerning the biblical-theological relationship between the church and creation. A substantial number of respondents (65 percent) observed that the commission of Genesis 1:28 could be seen as applying, not just to Adam and Eve, but to Israel and the church. Only a minority (39

¹Such a ready acceptance of covenantalism is likely a result of the emphasis I have placed on biblical-theological themes in my preaching over the past two years. For instance, over the first six months of 2009 I taught a sermon series on how Christ can be seen in the OT themes of creation, covenant, and kingdom (Appendix 17).

²In retrospect, the question regarding the temple may have been misleading, since the majority of NT references are found in the gospels and denote the physical temple in Jerusalem. A better phrasing for the question would have been, “In his letters, Paul most often likens the temple of God to”

percent), however, viewed the image of God as containing a ruling function.³ About half (52 percent) saw the mission to “enlarge God’s dwelling place” as originating with Adam and Eve. Large majorities correctly identified God’s purpose for creation as his own glory (87 percent) rather than companionship (78 percent correctly responded “false”).

On the topic of God’s preferential love for the church, almost all respondents (96 percent) understood the definition of the word “elect.” However, when asked to whom Jesus’ “least of these” statement (Matt 25:40) referred, only one respondent selected the correct answer (the most popular response was “the poorest of society”). The difficulty of this question was undoubtedly heightened by using “none of the above” (rather than “disciples” or “believers”) as the correct answer. However, the concept of Jesus’ intimate identification with his followers may have been difficult for people to grasp. Since only 35 percent correctly viewed as true the statement that “God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world,” it was apparent that the congregation needed additional teaching on the subject of God’s preferential love.

The short-answer responses (see Table A2 in Appendix 2) also indicated a somewhat mixed picture of the members’ knowledge concerning the church. On the positive side, respondents perceived the church as a community of believers whose mission is to make disciples. They viewed church unity as being important for mutual support, enhancing our mission, God’s glory, and as a demonstration of God’s nature. Concerning the purpose for creation, over half wrote something about spreading God’s image or glory. Few people, however, answered the second half of the question

³The concept of the image of God is not a settled theological issue. However, my objective in this project was to present a specific interpretive framework for understanding the church (outlined in chapter 2) and to measure people’s progress toward grasping that framework.

concerning the church's role in God's purpose; among those who did, the most common answer was that God accomplishes his purpose through disciple-making. On why Christians ought to maintain fellowship in a local church, most responded with some form of answer dealing with mutual support and encouragement. Based on the results of the short-answer section I planned to gear the sermon series to emphasize the role of the church in accomplishing God's purpose for creation and the theological reasons for belonging to a local church.

Sermon Series

I decided to use "I Belong" as the theme for the sermon series. The words communicated a simple message that could be applied in multiple senses: I belong to the local church, I belong to God as his child, and I belong to my fellow church members (in the sense of mutual accountability and responsibility). In light of the pre-project questionnaire results, which indicated a lack of understanding of God's elective love, the tone of the words was intended to be celebratory, instilling enthusiasm that one has been favored by the God of the universe.

The first message was titled "It's Not Who You Are but Whose You Are: The Church as the People of God" (see the outline in Appendix 5). The main point of the sermon was that we ought to value our fellow church members because they have been valued by God. I began with the illustration of Jenna Bush, the daughter of former president George W. Bush. I asked people to imagine that she had moved from nearby Baltimore to Hanover, Pennsylvania, and chose to visit Hanover Fellowship Church. I speculated that in the event that Jenna Bush arrived at our doorstep, we would roll out the red carpet for her. Members would be clamoring to serve on our visitor ministry team that day. They would be inviting her to lunch and to their houses. If Jenna Bush expressed a

need, our members would be eager to offer their assistance. Although her personal qualities may not be especially remarkable, she has special value in people's eyes by virtue of *whose* she is.

I pointed out that we are all children of a very important person (God). He has chosen us before the foundation of the world and adopted us as his children (Eph 1:4-5; John 1:12), making us part of his people Israel (Gal 6:16; Eph 3:6). When we read the Bible and see God's special love for Israel, we may identify with Israel as the recipients of that same love. To help people understand the discontinuities between the story of OT Israel and that of the NT church, I explained that the primary difference was that we no longer follow the Torah inscribed on tablets of stone. Rather, we follow the Torah written in the flesh of Jesus Christ, and we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so.

I took the opportunity to remedy the congregation's misunderstanding of God's preferential love. I explained that the questionnaire revealed that most people resisted acknowledging that God loves the church in a different way from the way he loves the world. People appear to have a rule of fairness which they apply to God and his love. Using Scripture I pointed to the exclusive promises made to Abraham, noting in Genesis 12:3 how God identifies specifically with his chosen people and how they are treated. I also referenced Zechariah 2:8 and Matthew 25:40. Although God loves the world in a general way (Matt 5:45), he does not identify with them as he does with his children. To illustrate the point, I asked people to imagine how they love their own children in a preferential way over the rest of the world.

Because we belong to God and he identifies with us in how we are treated, we must consider seriously how we treat each other. We ought to treat each other like celebrities, not by virtue of *who* we are but *whose* we are. I concluded by asking people

to imagine how our church would be if we all honored each other that highly.

The second message (Appendix 6) was titled “It’s Not About Us . . . Wait, Yes It Is: The Church ‘In Christ.’” The first half of the sermon explored the concept of Christ as the true chosen one and how the church derives its election, strength, and worth through him (building on the material covered in the first message). I employed Goldsworthy’s kingdom of God template as the basis for the Bible story: God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule.⁴ I briefly narrated the Bible story in terms of God’s people, beginning with Adam and Eve and extending to Israel. I explained that Israel failed to keep God’s requirements because of their DNA (they were in Adam). Because Christ did not possess Israel’s “congenital defect,” he was able to obey God perfectly, thus earning the status of God’s people (Gal 3:16).

If the message were to end with the realization that Christ was “God’s people,” we might conclude that “it’s not about us”; we are to come to church and worship Christ, hear sermons about him, and share the good news about him. But this conclusion is lacking in many respects. First, the church, having been given the divine nature of Christ, has become God’s people as well and is therefore a key part of the biblical story. Second, Christ ascended to heaven, having delegated his worldwide mission to the church. Third, the divine nature the church receives is that of a relational being, with the goal of bringing together people from every nature into one new race (John 17:20-23). We are forced to conclude “it is about us” and to reckon with each other and the obligations of our new nature. The love that we show to each other as believers is not simply an expression of love for Christ or for the sake of working together to proclaim the gospel; it

⁴Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2000), 54.

is a demonstration of the trinitarian nature of God, the same nature which now infuses our DNA. We have been remade into communal creatures.

The third message (Appendix 7), “The Church Is Not a Building . . . It’s a Garden: A Radical Re-imagining of Church,” was structured around the second part of Goldsworthy’s template: God’s place. I envisioned this sermon as an opportunity to provide a biblical-theological explanation of the church as God’s temple (see Beale’s model in Chapter 2), which would fill in the knowledge gaps apparent from the pre-project questionnaire. I began with the Garden of Eden, the place where God walked and talked with his people. Next I spoke about the temple (and Israel by extension) and how God walked with his people there (Lev 26:11-12). Then I related how Christ was the ultimate dwelling place for God (John 2:19-21; 1:14). But as the church was God’s people through Christ, so the church is God’s place through Christ. I emphasized that in the majority of places in the NT where the church is called God’s dwelling place, the corporate church rather than individual believers is in view (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; Heb 3:6).

Having identified the church as God’s place, I proceeded to detail why that fact is significant. Just as God nourished his people in the primeval garden, for instance, he nourishes them through his dwelling place, the church. Through fellowship with one another, believers can find spiritual nourishment in the form of unity, belonging, needs being met, and working together for a common goal. Another point of significance is that, from the standpoint of the outside world, the church is the place where the world meets God. Believers speak (Rom 10:15-17) and embody the gospel (Matt 5:14; 1 Pet 2:12).

The titles of the final three messages were prefixed with the phrase “On

Mission Together.” These sermons marked a transition from talking about the nature of the church to its function. Again, following Beale’s model, the textual basis came from Genesis 1:26-28. In the fourth message (Appendix 8), I explored the concept of God’s image being given to humanity. I explained that God imbued Adam and Eve with the function of being benevolent rulers over his creation (in a sense, to “image” him to the plants, animals, and other humans). After Adam and Eve sinned, and the image became defaced, God followed his own nature as benevolent ruler in sending his son to rescue humanity. Having been restored to the image of our creator (recognizing the progressive nature of sanctification, of course), we can now care for each other (in the church) as we were created to do.

In the fifth message (Appendix 9), I taught how the image of God, shown through the benevolent rule of humans, also has an outreach function. It is intended to result in the praise of others (Matt 5:14-16; 1 Pet 2:12) and God’s glory filling the earth (Num 14:21; Hab 2:14). The command to multiply the bearers of the divine image over the face of the earth is given repeatedly in the Bible (Gen 1:28; 35:11; Matt 28:18-20).

In the sixth and final message (Appendix 10), I expanded on the final part of Goldsworthy’s kingdom template: God’s rule. I narrated a history of spiritual war in the Bible, from the rebellion of Satan to his final defeat as predicted in Genesis 3:15. I explained how the church is not just reclaimed enemy territory, it is the front line of attack in the war to redeem the cosmos. I encouraged the congregation to become involved, knowing that no role is insignificant (an apt illustration was provided by one of our members who had meticulously charted 117 people and events that had led him to accept Christ as a teenager).

Participation Survey

Following the final sermon message, I distributed the Participation Survey (Appendix 4) and gave the congregation a brief time period for completion. Out of the 25 surveys returned, 9 were from people who expressed interest in serving but who had not previously volunteered (raising the total number of volunteers from 31 to 40, a 29 percent increase). The remaining 15 surveys were from people who already volunteered in some capacity. Out of these 15, 12 requested an increase in volunteer duties.

The names of people responding to the Participation Survey were categorized by ministry area and delivered to the respective leaders for those ministry areas. The ministry leaders were instructed to follow-up with respondents by telephone or email. Our goal was to mobilize people into ministry as quickly as possible, while their interest was fresh.

Post-project Questionnaires

At the conclusion of the sermon series, the factual questionnaires (Appendix 1) were once again delivered to the congregation. I asked that everyone who had attended at least two-thirds of the sermons (a requirement specified in chapter 1) consider completing a questionnaire. Twenty questionnaires were received, 19 of which met the attendance requirement.⁵

The comparative performance of subjects on the pre-project and post-project questionnaires is summarized in Table 2. The mean percentage correct for all subjects increased from 68 percent to 81 percent following the sermon series. Whereas scores

⁵Participants were asked to write the number of sermons they attended on the front of the questionnaire. All but one of the returned questionnaires indicated attendance at 4, 5, or 6 sermons.

ranged as low as 33 percent on the pre-project questionnaire, no one scored lower than 60 percent on the post-project questionnaire.

Table 2. Questionnaire total scores

Questionnaire	Participants	Mean Correct (%)	Range (%)
Pre-project	23	68	33-93
Post-project	19	81	60-100

Note: Only the multiple choice and true-false portions of the questionnaire (questions 1-15) were taken into account for scoring.

When individual questionnaire items are considered (Table 3), response accuracy increased on all of the questions with the exception of question 15, which members answered correctly 100 percent of the time on both questionnaires, and three items (questions 1, 9, and 12) on which there were slight post-project decreases.⁶ These decreases were not deemed significant since they occurred on questions in which there was a high level of response accuracy during both pre-project and post-project assessment.

As can also be seen from Table 3, knowledge of the nature of the church remained strong. The biggest change in this topic area was on question 2 regarding the NT term “temple.” Sixty-five percent (up from 35 percent pre-project) correctly identified its theological association with the corporate church rather than individual members.

Knowledge of the mission of the church also increased. One hundred percent

⁶Minor decreases could have been due to variations in the subject pool from pre-project to post-project assessment.

of respondents (up from 65 percent) correctly equated loving other church members with loving Christ, demonstrating God’s trinitarian nature, and proclaiming the gospel. The number of people who could name Matthew as the book containing the Great

Table 3. Questionnaire results by item

Category/question	Correct responses (%)		Difference
	<i>Pre-project</i>	<i>Post-project</i>	
Nature of the church			
1. Which of the following statements best describes the church?	91	85	-6
2. The New Testament most often talks about the temple of God being . . .	35	65	+30
7. The Biblical word for “church” refers to the:	91	100	+9
12. The following are all described as God’s dwelling place in the Bible except:	96	95	-1
Mission of the church			
3. When we love the members in our church we are:	65	100	+35
11. The words “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” may be found in the book of:	78	90	+12
15. The Bible teaches that believers are given gifts from the Holy Spirit primarily for their own benefit	100	100	0
Relationship between the church and creation			
4. Whom did God command to multiply and fill the earth?	65	70	+5
5. To possess the image of God is primarily to:	39	55	+16
8. The mission to enlarge God’s dwelling place was first addressed to:	52	60	+8
9. The word that best describes God’s purpose for creation is:	87	85	-2
13. The Bible teaches that God created humans to provide himself company	78	95	+17
God’s preferential love for the church			
6. To be “elect” means:	96	100	+4
10. When Jesus refers to acts of service toward the “least of these” he means:	4	30	+26
14. The Bible teaches that God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world	35	80	+45

Commission rose 12 percent.

Knowledge of the relationship between the church and creation increased as well. Substantially more people understood the ruling aspect of God's image (an increase of 16 percent) as well as God's purpose for creation (an additional 17 percent). Slightly more people (8 percent) understood that the mission to enlarge God's dwelling place was first addressed to Adam and Eve.

The biggest improvements came on the topic of God's preferential love for the church. On the true-false item regarding whether "the Bible teaches that God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world," 80 percent answered in the affirmative (versus 35 percent on the pre-project questionnaire). Although the majority of people still answered question 10 incorrectly regarding "the least of these" (again, possibly a resistance to answering "none of the above"), 26 percent more people answered correctly post-project than pre-project.

Responses to the short-answer questions are summarized in Table A4 of Appendix 3 and are roughly consistent with the pre-project assessment on the topics of the nature (question 16) and mission of the church (question 18) and the purpose for creation (question 19). One difference pre- to post-project was that more people focused on the missional implications of unity (question 17). As in the pre-project assessment, most people gave simple and pragmatic responses to question 20 concerning the reason for maintaining fellowship in a local church. The most common reason suggested was "to support each other." The continued lack of understanding from pre- to post-project indicates that I failed to adequately communicate the deeper sense of what it means to belong to the local church: the strong biblical witness to the church's corporate nature along with its associated trinitarian (God as a relational being) and gospel proclamation

(John 13:35) aspects.

Discipleship Lessons

On October 10, 2010, one week following the end of the sermon series, I launched the “I Belong” discipleship series. These lessons were taught as part of the church’s regular Sunday evening discipleship activities. Each lesson lasted for approximately 80 minutes. The lessons utilized a small classroom environment and were interactive with the students. The content of the discipleship lessons paralleled that of the sermon series but included additional application to the local church context. At the end of each lesson, an outline was handed out to all participants.

Lesson 1 was titled “What Is the Church?” and covered basic information related to the nature of the church (see Appendix 11). After a discussion of a suitable definition for the church, I demonstrated through Scripture how OT Israel and the NT church are related. An important point was that the Holy Spirit indwells the post-Pentecost body of believers, regenerating them and empowering them to obey the living Torah, Jesus Christ. For the last part of the class I asked the students to imagine that they were starting a new church and needed to develop membership guidelines. An interesting discussion ensued. After class a group of four youth (who had attended my study because their teacher was absent) approached me and said that they found the class very enlightening. They asked if it would be possible for them to continue attending the “I Belong” series of discipleship lessons. Arrangements were made with the teacher, who was also interested in attending, and the youth were invited back.

In Lesson 2, “How Is the Church Special?” the topic of God’s preferential love was explored (see Appendix 12). For some class participants, the doctrines of predestination and election ran counter to what they had been taught in other churches, so

it was essential for me to approach those topics patiently and from the biblical evidence. My objective of the class was for students, after realizing their own special status as God's children, to grow in their outward love toward their brethren. The students appeared to receive the lesson well and to appreciate the in-depth Scripture study.

Lesson 3, "What Can Go Wrong in the Church?" explored the requirement for holiness among the people of God and to what extent that requirement can be met in the modern church (see Appendix 13). The concept of cutting a person off from the community of believers was compared between the OT and NT. An examination of Matthew 18:18-20 provoked a vigorous discussion of whether Christ actually binds or looses sins based on a church's disciplinary decisions (especially when different factions of the church might disagree on that decision). I felt that the lesson gave participants the sense that, while we must strive to keep our church pure, the steps involved with doing so must be approached with extreme care.

Lesson 4 was titled "What is the Purpose of the Church?" (Appendix 14). After explaining the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden in biblical-theological terms (God's dwelling place and God's mission of glory), I asked the class to prepare a similar presentation for Israel and Jesus. I divided the class into two teams of four people. The first team was asked to make the case, based on the Bible verses in the handout, that Israel was like the Garden of Eden. The second team was asked to do the same for Jesus. I gave the teams 25 minutes and remained available for answering questions. As I listened to the teams' discussions and their final presentations, I was impressed by how well they had developed a template for viewing the biblical storyline. For the final 30 minutes of class, I led the class in an investigation of how the church can be seen in terms of the Garden of Eden. Bible verses were assigned for each member of the class to look

up, so the discussion could proceed in a timely manner. After the class, a few of the participants told me about how excited they were about what they had learned.

Lesson 5, “How Does the Church Accomplish Its Task?” explored the differences between OT and NT warfare. In the OT, Israel enlarged God’s dwelling place through holy war with rebel nations. In the NT, however, we are taught that our ultimate enemies are spiritual, and we grow God’s dwelling place through the sharing of the gospel in word and deed. Evangelism, then, is warmaking. Each new believer is enemy territory reclaimed. Rather than an ethnic nation in a geographically demarcated land, the church is a multiethnic community that knows no boundaries. Among the applications from the lesson, participants were encouraged to examine the misunderstandings inherent in the dominionist elements within the church.

Focus Group Interviews

Five people (1 male, 4 females) from the discipleship class volunteered to take part in the focus group. Volunteers were interviewed during the week following the end of the discipleship course. Interviews were conducted by phone using the script in Appendix 16. The agreement to participate was read to them, and then the questions were asked in succession. I wore an earpiece so my hands could be free to type their answers.

The first participant said that the “I Belong” course enhanced his understanding of the connections between the OT and NT. He felt that he was better equipped to converse with those in the church who understood the OT. He was so excited about his newfound knowledge that he shared it with a coworker.

The second participant also emphasized teaching as the aspect which she appreciated about Hanover Fellowship Church. The “I Belong” course helped her to realize the value of reading the Bible as a whole. It also showed her that she was a part of

a community and mission that is worldwide instead of merely local.

The third participant said that the course enhanced her sense of community. She said she values the growing small-group ministry at our church and that the course reminded her to not allow personality differences to get between herself and other people. She said that, based on the lesson on imaging God to others, she thinks more about how she is behaving around clients and coworkers at her workplace.

The fourth participant said that she values knowing that our church participates in the same mission that was given to Adam and Eve. As a result of the course, she thinks more about the need to show other people of the church the same preferential love that God shows her. She also appreciated coming to a better understanding of the Bible as a whole.

The fifth participant said that the course helped to solidify the idea that church is about the people. She said she finds Hanover Fellowship Church to be a good example of a biblical church in that people have always been our focus. She also enjoyed the discipleship lessons on how Israel and the church are reestablishments of the Garden of Eden.

DVD Production

Two cameras recorded me as I delivered the six sermon messages. One camera was fixed for a static shot, while the other was operated by the leader of our media ministry. At the end of the project video footage was edited by the media ministry for production to DVD. The DVDs will be made available to prospective members of Hanover Fellowship Church.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter presents an evaluation of the project. I will summarize the research data presented in Chapter 4 to determine whether the project met its stated goals. I will also take a critical look at the project's methodology to highlight its strengths and weaknesses. Having the benefit of hindsight, I will suggest things I would do differently if I were to administer the project again.

Finally, I will provide some theological and personal reflections on the impact the project has made on Hanover Fellowship Church and my ministry. Having the opportunity to reflect on the project allows me to evaluate how my theological convictions have been honed through the process of researching, preparing, and delivering the course material. The members of the church may have learned over the course of the project, but I have learned as well.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this project was to equip the members of Hanover Fellowship Church with a biblical-theological framework for understanding the nature and purpose of the church and their role in it. Was the purpose appropriate to the ministry context? Did the project succeed in accomplishing its purpose? Regarding the former question, the purpose seems appropriate given the ministry context of a portable

church (i.e., renting various facilities in which to hold its programs) with a strong sense of mission but with apparent weaknesses in commitment toward fellow members.

Although other intervention strategies (e.g., fellowship events, team-building activities) might also have been appropriate, the methodology of the project best reflects my ministry gifts, theological convictions, and interests. The assumption also seems reasonable that exposure to eleven weeks (roughly nine hours total) of preaching or teaching would result in measurable changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among a moderately educated Christian audience.

Whether the project succeeded in accomplishing its purpose is best answered by evaluating to what extent the measurable benchmarks were achieved (see next section); however, the question may also be looked at from the larger standpoint of whether the project proceeded according to plan. In that vein the project proceeded smoothly, without interruption, and with no major impediments. The content developed for the course possessed a fidelity with the writings of scholars and a theological and practical coherence. It seems reasonable, then, to expect positive results from the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

The first goal of the project was to increase members' knowledge of the nature and purpose of the church. Questionnaire results, as summarized in chapter 4, evidenced substantial knowledge gains, indicating success in accomplishing this goal. The average number of correct responses jumped from 68 percent to 81 percent over the course of the project. Response accuracy increased on twelve out of fifteen objective items on the questionnaire; on seven items the increase was more than ten percentage points.

Focus group responses also indicated that the knowledge goal was met. All five focus group participants mentioned that they had achieved a greater knowledge of

what the Bible teaches about the church. Four out of five said that they appreciated having gained a better understanding of the Bible as a whole, particularly the unity between the OT and NT.

Regarding the second goal (increasing members' love for the church), focus group responses were indicative of success. One participant said that as a result of the project she had an increased sense of belonging to the worldwide church and a greater appreciation for those who may be outside her local church but on the same mission. Another participant reported that she developed a heightened sense of being part of a community rather than being a "Lone Ranger." She felt that everyone needs to be valued and that she needed to be more resolute in preventing differences from getting between her and other members. Yet another participant reported that she possessed a greater appreciation for the special bond (Christ) that she shares with her friend in the church, something that she does not have in common with her friends at school.

The third goal was to increase member involvement in the church. As a result of the project, nine people became first-time volunteers, and fifteen people increased the scope of their volunteer duties. The rate of increase, 29 percent over baseline, fell short of the project's targeted rate of 50 percent.

The fourth goal, strengthening and facilitating my outreach to prospective members, was accomplished by the videoing of the sermon series. The resultant DVD will be helpful in orienting prospective members to the essential aspects of Hanover Fellowship Church, preparing them for successful assimilation, and guarding against the dangers inherent when membership is taken lightly. Having a DVD to hand to prospective members will augment the impact of the existing informational sessions I have with them.

Strengths of the Project

The project seemed well-suited for Hanover Fellowship Church, whose members tend to be young, active, and intellectually curious. The members appreciated the fact that I am pursuing a doctoral degree, and they seemed to enjoy taking part in the study. A genuine sense of optimism and importance seemed to be shared between the congregation and me. Members were generally eager to participate in the questionnaire and told me that they hoped that they scored well. A few said that they had listened online to the sermons they missed so that they could perform well on the post-project assessment.

The course material resonated with the members of the church and provided them with a conceptual framework on which to assimilate future Bible knowledge. While the theological depth of the material appealed to the more advanced students of the Bible, the repetition of key themes gave even beginning students a sense that they understood the Bible's big picture. The combination of oral and visual (PowerPoint, paper handouts) modes helped in adapting the content to different styles of learning.

A further strength of the project was that the impact will not be limited to Hanover Fellowship Church. Knowledge and appreciation of the church are "portable" aspects that members will carry with them as their lives take them to different geographic areas. Members are now equipped to positively impact the culture of churches wherever they go.

Weaknesses of the Project

One weakness of the project is that, since the members of Hanover Fellowship Church already possessed a beginning knowledge of biblical theology (I spent the first six months of 2009 teaching biblical theology from the pulpit; see Appendix 1), they

were “primed” for the course material. This priming effect likely inflated their scores on the pre-project questionnaire, thereby reducing the potential magnitude of the pre- to post-project knowledge gains. For example, 9 out of 10 respondents had a covenantal understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church before the project began (surprising, given that members of Hanover Fellowship Church come from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds). Also notable was the level of pre-project knowledge on other biblical-theological aspects: 65 percent were able to see that the Adamic commission (Gen 1:28) was also received by Israel and the church, 52 percent understood that same commission in terms of a command to enlarge God’s dwelling place, and 87 percent identified “glory” as the term that best described God’s purpose for creation.

A second methodological weakness was the possibility of selection bias among the subjects. For instance, since the questionnaires were anonymous and completely voluntary, it is possible that only the most theologically proficient members participated. In that case, the project would not have measured knowledge changes in the less theologically proficient members. Such a case of selection bias would have resulted in a skewed view of pre-project knowledge levels.¹

A third weakness was that the anticipated changes in knowledge and attitude levels were predicated upon consistent attendance at sermons and discipleship lessons, which was not the norm during the project period (nor is it ever the norm at Hanover Fellowship Church). Members missed church for a variety of reasons, including work, vacation, children’s sporting events, activities with extended family, and illness. In fact, I estimated that very few people were in attendance for all six sermons. Such inconsistency

¹However, as long as the bias operated equally on the pre- and post-project tests, the conclusions drawn would still be valid, albeit only with regard to theologically proficient members.

made it difficult to build on theological themes from week to week. A case in point is that during the second sermon I paused to review how to understand “the least of these” from Matthew 25:40, based on the dismal accuracy regarding that item on the pre-project questionnaire. Essentially, I “taught to the test,” informing people of my concern with that item, explaining the question, and asking them to remember the answer for the post-project test. Only 30 percent, however, answered correctly on the post-project questionnaire. Did people forget, or were they absent when the review took place? Since the review was done on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, the latter explanation may be more likely.

Inconsistency in attendance was also typical for the evening discipleship lessons. Class size varied between 3 and 10 over the span of the project. Only 1 person attended all five classes. About a third of each week’s class time was spent reviewing material from previous weeks so that students could have a sense of the continuity and flow inherent in the course material.

A fourth weakness was the inability to adequately measure retention of members. A period of two to three years would have been ideal for determining if the project resulted in fewer people leaving the church. Instead, attitudes were measured by means of a focus group. Given the lack of evening attendance noted above, and the likelihood that evening attenders may therefore constitute the most loyal segment of the church, it is difficult to generalize from the focus group participants to the larger church community.

What I Would Do Differently

If I could do the project over again, I would first improve the questionnaire. I would substitute “his disciples” for “none of the above” (which may have evoked a

resistance to select) as the correct answer for question 12. I would change question 2 from “The New Testament most often talks about the temple of God being” (includes the gospel references, which denote the Jerusalem temple) to “In his letters, Paul most often likens the temple of God to” (denotes the corporate church). And, I would eliminate the short answer questions due to the difficulty of scoring the responses and the potential for intimidating prospective test takers.

Second, I would change the way the focus group operated so that their evaluation of the course could be improved. I would select focus group participants at the beginning of the project (rather than at the end of the discipleship series) and give them a diary to complete for each sermon or discipleship lesson.² Having their thoughts recorded would help them to better participate in the final evaluation of the course (several focus group participants wished that they had been given some type of summary of the course material prior to answering my questions; one even asked to continue the interview on the following day so that she could have time to review the online sermons).

Theological Reflections

This project is the second sustained attempt I have made to teach biblical theology at Hanover Fellowship Church. My first attempt was when I preached a twelve-message series in 2009 separated into three major parts: Christ and creation, Christ and covenant, and Christ and kingdom (see Appendix 17). In both the previous and current endeavor, I have been firm in my conviction that Christ is the center of all of Scripture, and I have been passionate in my desire to impart this knowledge to others, confident that

²I selected participants at the end because I feared that pre-selected people might not follow through with their obligations to attend the class.

they would be transformed by it.

The current project, though, presented a challenge in that the precise focus of the teaching was not Christ but the church. Sermon applications required more than “know Christ and you will be transformed.” As I explored this challenge I worried that, in concentrating on the church, I might be in danger of subverting the christological focus of Scripture.

As I was preparing a sermon (second in the series of six), originally titled “It’s Not About Us: The Church ‘In Christ,’” I had planned to focus on Christ, demonstrating that our election (the topic of the first sermon) takes place “in him” (Eph 1:4). The sermon was to serve as something of a corrective to the previous one, keeping the pride of believers in check by highlighting that Christ is the true chosen one. It was to culminate in worshipful awe coupled with a healthy dose of humility.

I felt dissatisfied with my initial approach, however. I realized that while the message that “Christ is everything” encourages believers to love Christ, worship him, and share his message, it lacks a rationale for our corporateness as the church (a lynchpin for the sermon series and the project). I took time to think through the theological issues surrounding the new nature God creates when he implants his Holy Spirit into believers. For instance, not only do believers become God’s people, capable of supernatural works, but they receive the DNA of a relational God, a God who in his own nature manifests perfect unity among diversity. As Ware has written, “Eternal relationality calls for and calls forth a created community of persons. The very fact that God, though singular in nature, is plural and societal in person, indicates that we should not view ourselves as isolated individuals who happen to exist in close proximity to others, but as

interconnected, interdependent relational persons in community.”³

Drawing from John 17:20-23, I observed how God intends to spread his glory by transformed human beings manifesting his “perfect unity among diversity” corporate nature. I began to wonder: Why did Christ ascend to heaven rather than consummating his kingdom in corporeal existence on earth? Among the various reasons, the Bible speaks of spiritual warfare (1 Cor 15:25), preparing a place for believers (John 14:2-3; cf. Acts 3:21), and intercession (Rom 8:34). But we must not overlook the fact that, in delegating his mission to the church, Christ was choosing to accomplish that mission through humanity created (recreated) in his image, a return to Genesis 1:26-28. Regarding this mission, the “how” is every bit as important as the “what.”

I ended that week with a deeper sense of God’s grace and a renewed enthusiasm for the church as a manifestation of God’s own relationality and oneness. I changed the title of the sermon to “It’s Not About Us . . . Wait, Yes It Is: The Church in Christ.” I came to see that Scripture’s center is indeed Christ, but the earthly manifestation of Christ is the church which has been restored to his image. The spotlight of Scripture’s drama does, to an extent, shine on God’s people and the degree to which they exhibit the characteristics of their new DNA. Although history’s verdict on how well the church exhibits Christ has been mixed, it is the responsibility of preachers to exhort Christians to more fully represent Christ in their corporateness, overcoming unnecessary barriers which divide them (though there are undoubtedly necessary ones), both in the local church and worldwide.

³Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 133-34.

Personal Reflections

I believe it is true that the best way to learn something is to teach it. My own journey through researching, preparing, and teaching the biblical theology of the church has ingrained it upon my mind and soul. As a pastor and preacher, I feel much more capable of describing the message of the Bible in a manner that is both simple and faithful to its authorial intent. In fact, the more I have learned about biblical theology, the more I have found myself asking (as I have heard some in my congregation ask over the course of this project), “How did I not know this before?” The most rewarding part of the experience, for me, has been hearing people tell me that they finally feel that they understand how the Bible fits together. Such sentiment indicates to me that I have been a good steward in investing the valuable gift I have been given. I am humbled that, in his sovereign grace, God chose to grant me this training through my Doctor of Ministry studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Conclusion

Over a fifteen-week period in 2010 I attempted to teach a biblical theology of the church to the members of Hanover Fellowship Church in Hanover, Pennsylvania. The project, in the form of a six-week sermon series and a five-week discipleship series, aimed primarily at increasing members’ knowledge about the nature and purpose of the church and enhancing their attitudes toward it. The project was a timely one for Hanover Fellowship Church, which has had several member families depart over the past two years.⁴

⁴While this project does not purport to close the proverbial back door of the church, it does aim to bring theological perspective on, and appreciation for, membership in those who remain in the church.

By various measures it appears that the project was successful in accomplishing its goals. Members' knowledge increased, and their attitudes toward the church and each other were more favorable at the end of the fifteen weeks. My own ministry was impacted as I developed a greater fluency with regard to biblical theology and gained a ready tool (in the form of a DVD recording of the series) with which to orient new members.

APPENDIX 1

PRE- AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Agreement to Participate:

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your understanding of the nature and purpose of the church as described in the Bible. This research is being conducted by Pastor Chuck Cruise for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will simply answer questions before we begin the sermon series and you will answer the same questions after we conclude the series. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please circle the best answer to the following questions.

1. Which of the following statements best describes the church?
 - a. The church is Israel's replacement because the Jews were disobedient to God
 - b. The church and Israel continue to exist separately under two different covenants
 - c. The church is part of the same covenant and promises that God made with Israel
 - d. The church has no relation to Israel

2. The New Testament *most often* talks about the temple of God being . . .
 - a. The community of believers
 - b. The individual believer
 - c. In heaven, awaiting the second coming of Christ
 - d. Rebuilt in Jerusalem prior to the Great Tribulation

3. When we love the members in our church we are:
 - a. Loving Christ
 - b. Demonstrating God's trinitarian nature
 - c. Proclaiming the gospel
 - d. All of the above

4. Whom did God command to multiply and fill the earth?
 - a. Jacob (Israel)

- b. Adam and Eve
 - c. The church
 - d. All of the above
5. To possess the image of God is *primarily* to:
- a. Look like God
 - b. Rule over God's creation in a benevolent way
 - c. Have a consciousness like God
 - d. None of the above
6. To be "elect" means:
- a. True
 - b. Circumcised
 - c. Chosen
 - d. Obedient
7. The Biblical word for "church" refers to the:
- a. People
 - b. Weekly service
 - c. Place of meeting
 - d. All of the above
8. The mission to enlarge God's dwelling place was first addressed to:
- a. Jesus
 - b. Solomon
 - c. Abraham
 - d. Adam and Eve
9. The word that best describes God's purpose for creation is:
- a. Joy
 - b. Fulfillment
 - c. Togetherness
 - d. Glory
10. When Jesus refers to acts of service toward the "least of these" he means:
- a. The poorest of society
 - b. The youngest of society
 - c. Sinners
 - d. None of the above
11. The words "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" may be found in the book of:
- a. Matthew
 - b. Revelation
 - c. James
 - d. John

12. The following are all described as God's dwelling place in the Bible except:
 - a. Jesus
 - b. The church building
 - c. The people of a church
 - d. Individual believers
13. True or false: the Bible teaches that God created humans to provide himself company
14. True or false: the Bible teaches that God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world
15. True or false: the Bible teaches that believers are given gifts from the Holy Spirit primarily for their own benefit

Please provide short answers (1 sentence) for the following questions.

16. Give a biblical definition of the church:
17. Why is it important to God that we be unified as a church body?
18. What is the mission of the church, according to the Bible?
19. What is God's ultimate purpose for his creation, and how is he using the church to accomplish it?
20. Why is it God's will that Christians maintain fellowship in a local church rather than go it alone?

APPENDIX 2

PRE-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Table A1. Pre-project multiple-choice and true-false responses

Question	Responses (23 participants)			
	a	b	c	d
1. Which of the following statements best describes the church?	1	1	21*	0
2. The New Testament most often talks about the temple of God being . . .	8*	13	2	0
3. When we love the members in our church we are:	8	0	0	15*
4. Whom did God command to multiply and fill the earth?	1	7	0	15*
5. To possess the image of God is primarily to:	0	9*	10	4
6. To be “elect” means:	0	1	22*	0
7. The Biblical word for “church” refers to the:	21*	0	0	2
8. The mission to enlarge God’s dwelling place was first addressed to:	1	4	6	12*
9. The word that best describes God’s purpose for creation is:	2	1	0	20*
10. When Jesus refers to acts of service toward the “least of these” he means:	14	1	7	1*
11. The words “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” may be found in the book of:	18*	0	1	4
12. The following are all described as God’s dwelling place in the Bible except:	1	22*	0	0
	True		False	
13. The Bible teaches that God created humans to provide himself company	5		18*	
14. The Bible teaches that God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world	8*		15	
15. The Bible teaches that believers are given gifts from the Holy Spirit primarily for their own benefit	0		23*	

Note: Correct responses are starred.

Table A2. Pre-project short-answer responses

Question	Key ideas and their frequency (23 participants)
16. Give a biblical definition of the church	Community of believers (22)
17. Why is it important to God that we be unified as a church body?	To support one another (4) To better accomplish our mission (4) To glorify God (3) To demonstrate God's nature (3)
18. What is the mission of the church, according to the Bible?	To make disciples (18) To spread the gospel (3)
19a. What is God's ultimate purpose for his creation . . .	To spread his image/glory (12) For people to be in relationship with him (4)
19b. . . . and how is he using the church to accomplish it?	The church makes disciples (5)
20. Why is it God's will that Christians maintain fellowship in a local church rather than go it alone?	To support each other (16)

Note: Ideas mentioned in at least three answers are included.

APPENDIX 3

POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Table A3. Post-project multiple-choice and true-false responses

Question	Responses (20 participants)			
	a	b	c	D
1. Which of the following statements best describes the church?	2	1	17*	0
2. The New Testament most often talks about the temple of God being . . .	13*	7	0	0
3. When we love the members in our church we are:	0	0	0	20*
4. Whom did God command to multiply and fill the earth?	0	6	0	14*
5. To possess the image of God is primarily to:	1	11*	4	4
6. To be “elect” means:	0	0	20*	0
7. The Biblical word for “church” refers to the:	20*	0	0	0
8. The mission to enlarge God’s dwelling place was first addressed to:	1	4	3	12*
9. The word that best describes God’s purpose for creation is:	1	1	1	17*
10. When Jesus refers to acts of service toward the “least of these” he means:	9	0	5	6*
11. The words “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” may be found in the book of:	18*	0	0	2
12. The following are all described as God’s dwelling place in the Bible except:	0	19*	0	1
	True		False	
13. The Bible teaches that God created humans to provide himself company	1		19*	
14. The Bible teaches that God loves the church in a different way from the rest of the world	16*		4	
15. The Bible teaches that believers are given gifts from the Holy Spirit primarily for their own benefit	0		20*	

Note: Correct responses are starred.

Table A4. Post-project short-answer responses

Question	Key ideas and their frequency (20 participants)
16. Give a biblical definition of the church	Community of believers (19)
17. Why is it important to God that we be unified as a church body?	To better accomplish our mission (8) To glorify God (4)
18. What is the mission of the church, according to the Bible?	To make disciples (16)
19a. What is God's ultimate purpose for his creation . . .	To spread his image/glory (11)
19b. . . and how is he using the church to accomplish it?	The church makes disciples (3) The church spreads his message (3)
20. Why is it God's will that Christians maintain fellowship in a local church rather than go it alone?	To support each other (14)

Note: Ideas mentioned in at least three answers are included.

APPENDIX 4
PARTICIPATION SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

Participation in ministry service at Hanover Fellowship Church is totally voluntary. If you would rather not serve in ministry at this time, then you do not have to complete this form.

Name: _____

Please check ministries in which you are interested in participating (as many as you'd like):

Children & Youth

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery | <input type="checkbox"/> Games |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children's Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Crafts & Activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Awana | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

Computer & Multimedia

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Burning CD copies | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo editing, photo slide shows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Running PowerPoint |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sound mixing | <input type="checkbox"/> Video editing |

Facilities

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setup (Sun. 8 a.m.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Takedown/cleaning (after worship) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lighting | |

Other

- Administrative – clerical tasks, errands
- Event coordination – e.g., baptism, picnic, Christmas party

- Guest Ministry – greeting, welcome table, follow-up
- Missions – planning and coordinating kindness outreaches and mission trips
- Personnel – scheduling, contacting workers
- Ushering – seating, counting the offering
- Other (please specify):

Circle one

1) Are you a member of Hanover Fellowship? Yes / No

If not, would you like to become one? Yes / No

2) Do you currently attend a Bible study? Yes / No

If not, would you like to receive
information on our Bible studies? Yes / No

3) Do you receive HFC emails? Yes / No

If not, you may write your email address below to be added to our list:

APPENDIX 5

SERMON 1 OUTLINE

It's Not Who You Are but Whose You Are: The Church as the People of God

1. Introduction: What if a child of an important person came to visit Hanover Fellowship Church?
 - a. Hypothetical example: Jenna Bush, who lives in Baltimore, MD
 - b. She has special value by virtue, not of who she is, but of whose she is (the child of a former president)
2. You belong to God
 - a. He has adopted you
 - i. "He chose us in Christ before the creation of the world In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Eph 1:4-5)
 - ii. "Children of God" (John 1:12)
 - iii. "God's elect" (1 Pet 1:1)
 - b. He has made you part of his people Israel (Gal 6:16)
 - i. The church doesn't replace Israel; it becomes one with them (Gal 3:28)
 - ii. "Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph 3:6)
 - c. He loves you in a special way
 - i. God/Jesus intimately identifies with his people
 - ii. "Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye" (Zech 2:8)
 - iii. "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse" (Gen 12:3; cf. Matt 25:40)
3. You belong at Hanover Fellowship Church
 - a. Therefore, I value you
 - i. No matter who you are
 - ii. I commit to love you and take care of you
 - iii. I commit to not judge you over trivial matters nor grumble about you
 - b. Will you do the same for me?

APPENDIX 6

SERMON 2 OUTLINE

It's Not about Us . . . Wait, Yes It Is

1. Introduction: Story of a man rescued after twenty years alone on a deserted island
 - a. When asked what one stone building is, he replies that it is his church
 - b. When asked about the other stone building, he replies that it is the church to which he used to belong
 - c. The story is an illustration of the tendency of people to be dissatisfied with their church and leave
 - d. Why is this tendency so prevalent? Because of a general lack of understanding about what the church is
2. It's not about us . . .
 - a. "For he chose us *in Christ* before the creation of the world" (Eph 1:4)
 - b. The Bible story
 - i. God's people . . . (Adam and Eve, Israel)
 - ii. In God's place . . . (Eden, Israel)
 - iii. Under God's rule
 - c. God's "people" ultimately is Christ
 - i. He serves as representative for all Israel
 - ii. He becomes God's people, the true Israel (Gal 3:16)
 - iii. He is the true "chosen one"
3. Or maybe it is
 - a. In the process of adopting us, God implants his spirit in us, giving us the same nature as X
 - b. So the church is God's people too!
4. The church "in Christ"
 - a. We are given Christ's nature, not just to save us as individuals, but to make us into a community
 - b. We have been given the DNA of a relational God
 - i. In Jesus' prayer (John 17:20-23) he pictures the church as an expression of the unified community within the godhead
 - ii. If you are "in Christ", then loving is in your DNA

APPENDIX 7

SERMON 3 OUTLINE

The Church Is Not a Building . . . It's a Garden: A Radical Re-imagining of Church

1. Introduction: Hanover Fellowship Church's attempts to find a building in which to worship
 - a. Mistaken belief: we are not a good enough church without a building
 - b. Mistaken belief: the building where we meet is God's house
2. We are the place where God walks and talks
 - a. The Bible story
 - i. The Garden of Eden was where God walked and talked with his people
 - ii. Israel and the Temple was where God walked and talked with his people (Lev 26:11-12)
 - iii. Christ is God's ultimate dwelling place (Immanuel; John 2:21)
 - iv. Christ gives his spirit to believers, so the church becomes God's dwelling place
 - b. "We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Cor 6:16)
 - i. "God's temple" (1 Cor 3:16), "holy temple . . . dwelling of God" (Eph 2:21), "a spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5), "His house" (Heb 3:6)
3. We are the place where God nourishes his people
 - a. God nourishes us through fellowship (koinonia)
 - i. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42)
 - ii. Unity
 - iii. Belonging
 - iv. Needs being met
 - v. Working together for a common goal
 - b. This nourishment happens every time we are together
4. We are the place where the world meets God
 - a. We speak the gospel (Rom 10:15-17)
 - b. And we embody the gospel (Matt 5:14)

APPENDIX 8

SERMON 4 OUTLINE

On Mission Together: Restored to the Image of Our Creator

1. Introduction: Selfless acts
 - a. The story of medal-of-honor recipient Army Staff Sergeant Salvatore Giunta
 - b. This is a lesson on what God expects of us, what he created us to do
2. The image of God is the creator's love
 - a. The first mention of "image of God": the creation story
 - b. Why God created Adam and Eve (Gen 1:26, 28): for humans to rule over creation, being an image of his love and holiness, thereby filling the earth with his glory
 - c. Humanity was to rule over creation (Ps 8:4-8), including animals, plants (Gen 2:5), and other people
 - d. Humanity was made in "image of God" to reflect the creator's love
3. The image of God is the creator's example
 - a. The enemy entered the garden and turned Adam and Eve from their mission
 - i. Problem: the image of God was defaced, and creation would no longer respond well to humanity's caretaking
 - ii. Additional problem: humanity's separation from the creator; death
 - iii. So the creator lives up to his own image: he himself comes to rescue us
 - b. Solution: Jesus Christ
 - i. An acted-out example of the creator's love (cf. story of Salvatore Giunta)
 - ii. The image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; John 14:9)
4. The image of God is the creator's gift
 - a. Jesus does not just reconcile us with the creator, he restores us to the creator's image (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; Rom 8:29)
 - b. This restoration is a gift to the church for outreach
 - c. But it is also meant as a gift to the church for inreach (John 13:35; Eph 4:16)
 - d. We are to take care of each other

APPENDIX 9

SERMON 5 OUTLINE

On Mission Together: God's People as Instruments for His Glory

1. Introduction: A children's story about a princess
 - a. The king loves the princess very much, but leaves her in a land across the river where there is suffering
 - b. However, the knowledge that she is the king's daughter--and that he is coming soon to take her home--allows the princess to remain joyful, which impacts those around her
2. God's glory
 - a. Divine quality (magnificence) and the human reaction (praise)
 - b. God's goal: for his glory to fill the earth (Num 14:21; Hab 2:14)
 - c. God's plan to accomplish this goal: through humanity (Gen 1:28)
3. *We* bring glory to God
 - a. As with OT Israel, we show the world what it is like to be in covenant with God, to have him dwelling in our midst (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9)
 - i. Despite what some think, Israel was missional; commanded to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 35:11), at their height of glory they attracted visitors from thousands of miles away (1 Kgs 10)
 - ii. We are now the "place" (spiritual community, not physical location) where the world meets God
 - b. We shine the light of his glory through our testimony and actions (Isa 60:1; Matt 5:14-16; 1 Pet 2:12)
 - i. Lots of people do good deeds
 - ii. But who gets the glory when they do it?
4. Hanover Fellowship Church's mission statement set in light of the story of the princess:
 - a. Tell those around us about the king who's coming to take us home
 - b. Demonstrate that he's real through acting differently than expected
 - c. What makes it possible for us to do this? The knowledge that "we belong" to the king of the universe

APPENDIX 10

SERMON 6 OUTLINE

On Mission Together: What Role Will You Play in God's Plan to Redeem the World?

1. Introduction: A member diagrammed 117 separate people and events that resulted in his salvation
2. The Bible story
 - a. God's people
 - b. In God's place
 - c. Under God's rule
 - i. God wants the world to be put back to its created purpose to glorify him by being under his benevolent rule
 - ii. Humanity was supposed to rule for God (Gen 1:26)
3. God's plan to reclaim his rule over creation
 - a. A brief history of war
 - i. Following the Fall, a prediction of the crushing of Satan (Gen 3:15)
 - ii. Jesus, the human who came to destroy Satan (1 John 3:8)
 - iii. Jesus inaugurates the return of God's rule over the earth (Mark 1:15)
 - iv. Jesus' victory enrages Satan, who turns his wrath on the church (Rev 12:17)
 - v. The church fights with spiritual weapons and armor (Eph 6:11; Rev 12:11)
 - vi. The church is instrumental in crushing Satan (Rom 16:20)
4. What role will you play in God's plan?
 - a. You belong to God (you are enemy territory that has been reclaimed)
 - b. You belong to his plan (you are part of the "you" in Rom 16:20)
 - c. You belong to his church
 - i. Stay close to the flock
 - ii. Love and be loved
 - iii. Contribute to the mission
 - d. A hypothetical scenario: John and Jane become disciples
 - i. They have various experiences with church members in their community and at worship services to which they are invited
 - ii. They eventually come to follow Christ
 - iii. Who played a role in their coming to follow Christ?
 - iv. Better question (drawing from the opening illustration): who did not play a role?

APPENDIX 11

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 1

What Is the Church?

Definition of “Church”

Linguistic history:

1. From the Old English “circe,” derived from the Greek “kyriakon (doma)” meaning “the Lord’s (house)”
 - a. English translators used “church” for the Greek word “ekklesia”
 - b. Ekklesia simply means assembly, as in “that all this *assembly* may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear” (1 Sam 17:47)
 - c. Ekklesia is used as a verb (to assemble) and a noun dozens of times throughout the OT
 - d. It became a specialized term in the NT to designate followers of Christ
2. Theological definition: “The community of true believers for all time”
 - a. “Community”
 - i. Local (Acts 11:22; 13:1; 1 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1)
 - ii. Universal (Eph 5:25; 1 Cor 12:28)
 - b. “True believers”
 - i. Proper theology (1 John 4:15)
 - ii. Evidence of regeneration by the Spirit (Matt 7:16; Gal 5:22-23)
 - c. “For all time”: Jews and Gentiles are “one” (Eph 2:14, 15, 19)

Aspects of the Church

Visible (mixture of true and false believers that we see) vs. invisible (the true community that God sees); Matt 13:24-30; 25:32-46

Voluntary

Purity/holiness that proclaims God’s holiness to the world

1. A place where God dwells with his people (Lev 26:12; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 3:16)
2. “A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9; see Exod 19:5-6)
3. Sometimes God judges the community directly. At other times, he has the community judge itself:

- a. Offenders were to be “cut off” (Lev 17:3-4, 8-9; 10, 14; 18:29)
- b. They were to “purge the evil” from their midst (Deut 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24; see 1 Cor 5; 1 Tim 5:20; Tit 3:10; 2 John 10-11)
- c. Enforcement required the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15; see Matt 18:15-20)

Old Covenant vs. New Covenant Community

No longer is purity a matter of belonging to an ethnic nation (circumcision); it is now found in the circumcision of the heart (regeneration by God’s Spirit; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:25-27)

Jesus has taken his seat at the right hand of God, being appointed the King, the living Torah, on whom the fate of all men rests

Application

Membership requirements of Hanover Fellowship Church

1. “Membership shall be extended to all who have had and whose lives evidence a genuine experience of regeneration through faith in and acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior; who renounce sin; who endeavor to live a consecrated life wholly unto the Lord; who enter into the Church covenant contained herein; who agree to submit to the authority of the Church and its leaders as set forth herein; and upon compliance with any one of the following conditions:
 - a. By baptism by immersion as a true believer in Christ Jesus as personal Savior;
 - b. By letter of transfer from another Bible-believing church of like faith, or other written statement of good standing from the prior church if the applicant has been baptized by immersion subsequent to a profession of faith;
 - c. By testimony of faith, having been baptized by immersion as a believer; or
 - d. By restoration, if having been removed from membership, upon majority vote of the Church Council after confession is made publicly before the Church Council of the sin or sins involved, and satisfactorily evidencing repentance to the Pastor.

Church covenant of Hanover Fellowship Church

1. As members of God’s covenant family known as Hanover Fellowship Church, we commit ourselves to God and to one another to be Christ-like in our lives and relationships through the presence, guidance, and power of God’s Holy Spirit (1 Pet 2:21).
2. We will love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34), honor one another above ourselves (Rom 12:10), be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32), encourage and build up one another (1 Thess 5:11), comfort one another (2 Cor 1:4), and offer hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9).

3. We will have a spirit of unity based on our common bond in Christ (Eph 4:3-6), be united in mind and convictions (1 Cor 1:10), meet together regularly (Heb 10:25), have equal concern for each other, suffer when one suffers and rejoice when another is honored (1 Cor 12:25-26), and consider others more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3).
4. We will use our God-given knowledge to instruct one another (Rom 15:14), use our spiritual gifts to bless one another (1 Cor 12:7), use the Word of Christ to teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16), and nurture one another toward spiritual maturity measured by the life and ministry of Jesus (Eph 4:13).
5. We will confess our sins to one another, pray for each other (Jas 5:16), warn those who are idle, encourage the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with one another (1 Thess 5:14), forgive one another as the Lord forgave us (Col 3:13), and gently restore those who sin (Gal 6:1).
6. We will not talk negatively about one another (Jas 4:11), not pass judgment on one another, not put any stumbling block in one another's way (Rom 14:13), not be morally impure, not use obscenities, not be greedy (Eph 5:3-4), but we will be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
7. We will let the light of godly lives shine together to bring glory to God (Matt 5:16).

APPENDIX 12

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 2

How Is the Church Special?

Review: The Importance of the Holy Spirit

Main difference between the old and new way (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:27; Deut 30:6); the OT reveals the inability of humanity to obey/love God without the Holy Spirit

How did the apostles know who was saved? Ecstatic experiences; they demonstrated they had received the “gift” of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8-9)

We Are Predestined, Chosen, Adopted

Israel as a chosen race (Gen 18:18-19; Isa 41:8-9)

Jesus as chosen (Matt 12:18; Luke 9:35)

Gentile believers as chosen (Eph 1:4-5)

The election of believers is spoken of by Jesus (Matt 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27), Luke (Acts 2:39; 10:41; 13:48); by Paul (Rom 8:28-30, 33; 16:13; Eph 1:11; Col 1:27; 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 2:10; Tit 1:1), by John (John 6:44; 13:18; 15:16; 2 John 1:1; Rev 17:14), by James (Jas 2:5), by Peter (1 Pet 1:1; 2:9; 5:13)

Election is referred to in-depth in Romans 9-11

Implications

God covenantal love is preferential

1. He chooses to reveal himself to some, not all (Rom 9:13f.; Matt 11:27)
2. Personal and cultural barriers to this idea
3. God identifies personally with those he chooses (Isa 43; Zech 2:8)

God is sovereign over salvation

1. The need for something outside ourselves (the Holy Spirit)
2. The role of human responsibility, sin, repentance
3. Personal and cultural barriers to this idea (yet we pray for God to save people)

4. The idea of a God who hides himself from some? (Matt 11:25-27; John 12:40; Rom 9-11)

How believers should be treated

1. Jesus personally identifies with the way believers are treated (Matt 25:40; 10:14-15, 40, 42; 18:10 [on “little ones” see v. 14]; cf. Gen 12:3, Rahab)
2. We ought to personally identify with each other’s suffering (Heb 13:3)

How do I know if I’m chosen? Evidence of regeneration (1 Thess 1:4)

Does God love all people? Yes, general love (Matt 5:45) versus elective/salvific love

Could someone desire to come to Jesus and be rejected? No (John 6:37)

Does God want “all” people to be saved?

1. All without exception v. all without distinction
2. John 12:32
3. 1 Timothy 2:4
4. Titus 2:11
5. 2 Peter 3:9 (?)

Application

What does this teaching imply about you?

1. . . . about your salvation?
2. . . . about your assurance? (see John 6:37-39; 10:28-29, Rom 8:29-39; Phil 1:6; 1 Cor 1:8; Jude 1:24)

What does this teaching imply about how we ought to treat fellow Christians?

1. . . . about how we ought to treat others? (Gal 6:10; Rom 12:18)
2. . . . about evangelism and missions? (see Rom 10:14-15)

APPENDIX 13

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 3

What Can Go Wrong in the Church?

What does it mean to be a “holy people”? (1 Pet 2:9)

Faithfulness, purity (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:4; Heb 13:4; Rev 21:8)

Penalties for unholiness in the OT:

1. God’s direct judgment (Exod 32:9-10; Num 14:20-23; 20:12; 2 Sam 12:11)
2. The judgment of the community on God’s authority (Lev 17:3-4, 8-9, 10, 14; 18:29; Deut 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24)
3. Israel was to “cut off” offenders, “purge the evil” from their midst
4. Enforcement required the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15)

Israel was convicted of sin

1. They were banished from the land
2. Culminated in their rejection of God as their king (John 19:15)
3. But Christ suffers the penalty as the representative of God’s people (Dan 9:26; Isa 53:1-12; Gal 3:13; Matt 20:28; compare “He will have nothing” with “You will all fall away” in Mark 14:27)
4. So Christ is able to “wash” his people, present them to himself as a bride without stain or wrinkle (Eph 5:27)

Continuing requirement for holiness in the NT

1. Met through Christ’s blood
2. Met through Christ’s enabling power (Holy Spirit)

Enforcement of holiness is still in effect in the NT

1. Christ’s direct judgment (Matt 7:21-23; Acts 5:1-10; 1 Cor 11:29-30)
2. The judgment of the community on Christ’s authority (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5; Tit 3:10-11; 2 Thess 3:14-15; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 John 10-11)
3. We are to “cut off” offenders (Matt 16:19), “purge the evil” from our midst (1 Cor 5:13)
4. Enforcement requires the testimony of two or three witnesses (Matt 18:15-20)

What does it mean to be a unified people? (John 13:35; Eph 4:1-16)

Being careful not to be the cause of dissension (1 Cor 3:3; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:19-21; Phil 2:1-2)

A variety of gifts (1 Cor 12; Eph 4) working in harmony

An expression of the unity and distinction in the trinity

Application

What are some of the challenges to implementing church discipline?

What are some guidelines for knowing when to discipline and when to overlook an offense?

Discipline at Hanover Fellowship Church:

1. Discipline committee: pastor and church council (“These individuals shall have sole authority in determining heretical deviations from the Statement of Faith and violations of the Church covenant”)
2. Members are instructed to handle sin according to Matthew 18; removal from membership by the church council is the last step

What are some causes of disunity in the church?

APPENDIX 14
DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 4

See the following two pages for the class handout.

Table A5. The church as a reestablishment of Eden

	Garden of Eden	Israel	Jesus (true Israel)	Church (Israel)	New heaven/earth
Nature: God's dwelling place					
He walks and talks with his people	Gen 3:8-9	Lev 26:11-12	Matt 1:23 John 1:14; 2:21	Matt 28:20 1 Cor 3:16 2 Cor 6:16 Eph 2:21 1 Pet 2:5 Heb 3:6	Rev 21:3; 22:3-5
He requires purity/obedience	Gen 2:16-17, 25	Exodus Leviticus Deuteronomy	1 Pet 2:22 Heb 7:26	John 14:15 1 Cor 6:9-10 Eph 5:5	Rev 21:27
Result of purity/obedience					
Life/blessing		Deut 28:1-13	Gal 3:16 Phil 2:8-9	John 6:51 Rom 8:13	Rev 21:4; 22:2, 14
Result of impurity/disobedience					
Serpent gains influence	Gen 3:1f.	1 Kings 11:1-11	(Tries but fails) Matt 4:1, 11		
Eviction, death	Gen 3:23-24	2 Chr 36:18-20 Ezek 10	(As Israel's representative) Dan 9:26 Gal 3:13 Matt 27:46		
Creation is disturbed	Gen 3:17-19	Jer 4:23-26	Matt 27:45; 51	(Creation restored) Rom 8:19-22	(Creation restored) Rev 21:5

Table A5—Continued. The church as a reestablishment of Eden

	Garden of Eden	Israel	Jesus (true Israel)	Church (Israel)	New heaven/earth
Mission: God's glory (Num 14:21; Hab 2:14)					
Expand God's dwelling place by populating the earth with bearers of his divine image . . .	Gen 1:26-28	Gen 35:11	2 Cor 4:4 Col 1:15 Heb 1:3 John 14:9	Matt 13:31-32 John 20:22 2 Cor 3:18 Col 3:10 Rom 8:29 Eph 4:24	(Mission accomplished) Rev 21:6; 22:5
. . . so that all creation might see God and praise him	(Animals) Gen 1:2-28; 2:19 Ps 8:4-8 (Plants) Gen 2:5, 15	Exod 19:6 Isa 60:1-3 1 Kgs 10:9	John 9:38; 20:28	Matt 5:14-16 1 Pet 2:9, 12	Rev 21:23-24
Rid God's dwelling place of the serpent and his seed	(Gen 3:15)	Deut 20:16-18	Matt 12:34; 13:38-42 John 8:44 Heb 2:14 1 John 3:8	Matt 10:1 Rom 16:20 Eph 6:12 Rev 12:11	Rev 20:1-3, 10

APPENDIX 15

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 5

How Does the Church Accomplish Its Task?

How Israel accomplished its task

In pursuit of God's dwelling place: Israel

The enemy: rebel nations

The tactics: holy war (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)

How the church (Israel) accomplishes its task

In pursuit of God's dwelling place:

1. Present: The church (spiritual) (John 18:36)
2. Future: New heaven and new earth (physical/spiritual) (Romans 8:19f.; Revelation 21:1-4; 22, 27:22:1-4)
 - a. The enemy: spiritual powers (Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 13)
 - b. The tactics:
 - i. The power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:1; 1 John 4:4)
 - ii. The gospel truth spoken in word (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) and deed (love of enemies, Romans 12:14, 18; submission to authorities, Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-15; standing firm in faith, Ephesians 6:10-18; Revelation 12:11)

Application

1. How are the new heaven and new earth similar to the original Garden of Eden?
2. What are some ways that our church does spiritual warfare together?
Individually?
3. In your life, when have you been at your spiritually strongest (or weakest)? What kinds of things helped you to be strong?
4. Some Christians seek to establish the Kingdom of God by force as an earthly entity. What do they see as God's intended dwelling place, our enemy, and our tactics?

APPENDIX 16

FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your understanding of the nature and purpose of the church as described in the Bible. This research is being conducted by Pastor Chuck Cruise for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will simply be asked to express your opinions concerning the course of sermons and discipleship lessons you attended. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Please answer the following questions as thoughtfully and honestly as you can. Keep in mind that although positive impressions are valuable, constructive criticism is also valuable and welcome.

1. Which aspects of Hanover Fellowship Church are most important to you?
2. How did the course affect your thinking about those aspects?
3. How well does Hanover Fellowship Church meet the biblical picture of a “real” church?
4. How did the course change the way you understand your role in the church?
5. How did the course affect how you think or feel about other members?
6. Can you think of one or two situations during the past several weeks where you applied the course material in your daily life?
7. Is there any other feedback you would like to leave regarding the course?

APPENDIX 17

PRIOR SERMONS ON BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Christ and Creation

Christ and the Creative Word (January 18, 2009)

1. Main point: God is recreating the cosmos by means of Jesus Christ, his creative Word
2. Christ's role in creation
 - a. Where is he in Genesis?
 - b. What the NT says:
 - i. "By [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth. . . . All things were created by him and for him" (Col 1:16)
 - ii. "Through him all things were made . . ." (John 1:3)
 - iii. "Jesus Christ, through whom all things came" (1 Cor 8:6)
 - iv. "His Son . . . through whom he made the universe" (Heb 1:2)
3. A fresh look at Genesis 1
 - a. How did God accomplish his creative work?
 - i. His Word: "And God said . . ."
 - ii. "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made" (Ps 33:6; also see Ps 148:5; Isa 55:10-11; Heb 11:3)
 - iii. "By God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed" (2 Pet 3:5)
 - iv. In ancient times words were believed to have the ability to cause things to happen
 - b. John 1
4. Christ's role in the new creation
 - a. He is the Word which brings about the new creation
 - i. He speaks to nature, and it obeys (Mark 4:41; 7:37; John 5:8)
 - ii. He creates new hearts for us (Eph 2:10; Ezek 36:26)
 - iii. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Gal 6:15)
 - iv. "He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new'" (Rev 21:5)
 - b. He is the beginning of the new creation
 - i. "He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead" (Col 1:18)
 - ii. His resurrection inaugurates the new creation

5. Application
 - a. Trust in the power of Jesus Christ, God's creative Word
 - i. Your new body
 - ii. Your new heart

Christ and the Garden (January 25, 2009)

1. Main point: God has re-created the Garden of Eden in Jesus Christ, his perfect dwelling place
2. The garden
 - a. People: Adam and Eve
 - b. Mission: Eden-ize the world (Gen 1:26-28)
 - i. Extend God's glory by populating the land with divine image-bearers (Gen 1:26)
 - ii. Maintain purity (Gen 2:16-17, 25)
 - iii. God would walk in their midst (Gen 3:8)
 - c. Outcome:
 - i. They are cast out because of their sin (Gen 3:23-24)
 - ii. Creation is disturbed (Gen 3:17-19)
3. The garden, revisited
 - a. People: Jews
 - b. Garden: Land of Israel, temple (Exod 3:8; Ezek 20:6; Isa 5)
 - c. Mission: Eden-ize the world
 - i. Extend God's glory by populating the land with divine image-bearers (Gen 35:11)
 - ii. Maintain purity (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)
 - iii. God would walk in their midst (Lev 26:11-12)
 - d. Outcome:
 - i. They are cast out because of their sin (2 Kgs 25)
 - ii. Creation is disturbed (Jer 4:23-26)
4. The garden, perfected
 - a. People: Jews and Gentiles
 - b. Garden: Christ, the church (John 1:14; 2:21; Col 2:9; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:22)
 - c. Mission: Eden-ize the world
 - i. Extend God's glory by populating the land with divine image-bearers (Matt 28:18-20)
 - ii. Maintain purity (1 John 1:7)
 - iii. God would walk in their midst (2 Cor 6:16)
 - d. Outcome: Nearly 2000 years of success
5. Application
 - a. God's dwelling place is his people
 - b. Our mission is to extend the borders of his dwelling place

Christ and the Image of God (February 8, 2009)

1. Main point: The true image of God is being restored to believers through Jesus Christ
2. The image of God bestowed
 - a. Man was created to be God's representative on earth
 - b. To be benevolent ruler over the animals (Gen 1:28) and plants (Gen 2:5,15)
 - c. "You made him ruler over the works of your hands" (Ps 8:5)
3. Sin hindered man's ability to be benevolent ruler . . .
 - a. Over his wife (Gen 3:16)
 - b. Over his land (Gen 3:17-19)
4. How does the image of God get restored to humanity?
5. The image of God restored
 - a. Through Jesus Christ!
 - i. "Christ . . . is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4)
 - ii. "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15)
 - iii. "The Son is . . . the exact representation of his being" (Heb 1:3)
 - iv. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9)
 - v. He is the God-man (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35)
 - vi. He is the new Adam (1 Cor 15:21-49)
6. Application
 - a. By the power of the Spirit, we can be recreated in God's image
 - i. "We . . . are being transformed into his likeness" (2 Cor 3:18)
 - ii. "The new self . . . renewed in knowledge in the image of [our] creator" (Col 3:10)
 - iii. "Conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom 8:29)
 - iv. "The new self, created to be like God" (Eph 4:24)
 - b. To be God's representatives
 - c. To be benevolent rulers

Christ and the Cosmos (February 22, 2009)

1. Main point: God is renewing the cosmos through Jesus Christ
2. The purpose of the cosmos
 - a. To proclaim God's glory to his creatures
 - i. Genesis 1:31
 - ii. Proverbs 8:22-33
 - iii. Psalm 19:1-4
 - iv. Romans 1:18-20
 - b. For God to rule through a human (in His image) as benevolent ruler (Gen 1:26)
3. The corruption of the cosmos
 - a. It became less fruitful
 - i. "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen 3:17)
 - b. It became enemy territory
 - i. "You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used

to live when you followed the ways of this world [cosmos] and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (Eph 2:1-3)

4. How does the cosmos get renewed to its “very good” state?
5. The renewal of the cosmos
 - a. Christ first renews the people
 - i. “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (Rom 8:19-22)
 - b. Then He rids the cosmos of its corruption, enemies
 - i. “Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24-25)
 - c. Finally, Christ will reign over all of the cosmos (as benevolent ruler)
 - i. “The mystery of his will . . . to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head . . . Christ” (Eph 1:9-10)
 - ii. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!” (Rom 11:36)
 - iii. “All things were created by him and for him . . . through him [God will] reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Col 1:15-20)
 - iv. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . .” (Rev 21:1-5; 21:22-22:5; also see Isa 65:17)
6. Application
 - a. Are you part of the new creation yet?
 - i. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17)

Christ and Kingdom

Christ the Good Shepherd (March 8, 2009)

1. Main point: God is restoring his benevolent rule over his people through Jesus Christ
2. God’s rule over his people
 - a. The Garden of Eden
 - i. God ruled benevolently over his people
 - ii. Adam and Eve were created in God’s “image” to rule benevolently over creation
 - b. Israel (the “Garden” part 2)
 - i. The people asked for a ruler (1 Samuel 8)
 - ii. But the corruption of the image of God harmed Man’s ability to be benevolent ruler

- iii. Israel's kings allowed worship of other gods, formed alliances with other nations, oppressed the poor, and persecuted the prophets
- 3. God's solution
 - a. A benevolent ruler in His image from David's line
 - i. "I, the LORD, promise that a new time will certainly come when I will raise up for them a righteous descendant of David. He will rule over them with wisdom and understanding and will do what is just and right in the land" (Jer 23:5, NET)
 - ii. A good shepherd (Ezekiel 34)
- 4. Who would be the good shepherd?
- 5. Jesus Christ!
 - a. "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11)
 - i. Christ would sacrificially love and protect those he rules (John 10:11-15)
 - ii. His rule would extend to people from all nations (John 10:16)
- 6. Application
 - a. If Jesus is your shepherd . . .
 - i. His death on the cross has won eternal life for you
 - ii. His comfort and strength are yours for the asking
 - iii. His goodness to you will never end

Christ the Warrior King (March 15, 2009)

- 1. Main point: God is defeating the enemies of his people through his appointed king, Jesus Christ
- 2. God's people vs. the serpent, part 1
 - a. People: Adam & Eve
 - b. Mission: Eden-ize the world (Gen 1:26-28)
 - i. Extend God's glory by populating the land with divine image-bearers (Gen 1:26)
 - ii. Maintain purity (Gen 2:16-17, 25)
 - iii. God would walk in their midst (Gen 3:8)
 - c. Impurity in the Garden
 - i. Satan, in the form of a serpent
 - ii. He will ultimately be defeated by the offspring of the woman (Gen 3:15)
- 3. God's people vs. the serpent, part 2
 - a. People: Israel
 - b. Mission: Eden-ize the world (Gen 35:11)
 - c. Impurity in the "Garden"
 - i. Occupants of the land
 - ii. God's people were to cleanse the land of them (Deut 20:16-18)
 - iii. Ultimately, an anointed king would lead them to victory (2 Sam 7:1)
 - iv. But sin . . . (1 Kgs 11:1-11)
- 4. How would God's people prevail over their enemies?
- 5. Jesus Christ!

- a. A warrior king to finally defeat Satan and his offspring
 - i. To do what Adam should have done
 - ii. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8; also see Heb 2:14)
 - iii. Jesus is anointed as king . . . (Matt 3:16-17; also see Psalm 2)
 - iv. Then he preaches doom to the offspring of the serpent (Matt 12:34; 13:38; 23:33; John 8:44; also see Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:10; Matt 3:7; Eph 2:1-3)
- 6. Application
 - a. Our mission as God’s people is to Eden-ize the world (Matt 28:18-20)
 - i. Our enemy is spiritual (Eph 6:11-12; Revelation 12)
 - ii. The weapons we fight with are spiritual (Matt 5:16, 44; Ephesians 6; 1 Pet 2:12)
 - iii. The enemy territory we take is spiritual (John 18:36; Phil 3:20)
 - b. We act in service to our King, Jesus Christ
 - c. The defeat of Satan is imminent
 - i. “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20; Rev 20:10)

Christ the Judge of God’s People (March 22, 2009)

1. Main point: God has placed all authority in Jesus Christ to judge his people
2. Judgment, part 1
 - a. God’s people: Adam & Eve
 - b. Requirement: faithfulness/purity (Gen 2:16-17, 25)
 - c. Penalty: expulsion, death (Gen 3:23)
3. Judgment, part 2
 - a. God’s people: Israel
 - b. Requirement: faithfulness/purity (Genesis–Deuteronomy)
 - c. Penalty: expulsion, death (Deut 30:15-20)
 - i. God could judge them directly (e.g., Exod 32:9-10; Num 14:20-23; 20:12; 2 Sam 12:11)
 - ii. The community could judge on God’s authority, given two or three witnesses (e.g., Lev 17:3-4, 8-9, 10, 14; 18:29; Deut 17:7; 19:15; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 22, 24)
 - d. But sin . . .
4. How would God judge unfaithful Israel? How would they survive judgment?
5. Jesus Christ!
 - a. He is God’s appointed judge . . .
 - i. He comes to be king but is rejected by Israel’s leaders (John 19:15; Matt 21:5; Luke 19:12, 27; 20:9-18; Dan 7:13-14)
 - ii. This is a rejection of God himself: “The Father . . . has entrusted all judgment to the Son. . . . He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:22-23)
 - b. And he suffers the penalty in place of God’s people! (Dan 9:26; Isa 53:1-12; Gal 3:13; Matt 20:28)

- i. And restores purity to the community
- 6. Judgment, part 3
 - a. God's people: Church (2 Cor 6:14-18; 1 Cor 3:16)
 - b. Requirement: faithfulness/purity (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:4; Heb 13:4; Rev 21:8)
 - i. A new factor: the Holy Spirit
 - c. Penalty: expulsion, death
 - i. Christ judges people directly (Matt 7:21-23; Acts 5:1-10; 1 Cor 11:29-30)
 - ii. The community judges on Christ's authority, given two or three witnesses (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5; Titus 3:10-11; 2 Thess 3:14-15; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 John 10-11)
- 7. Application
 - a. We must take seriously Christ's final judgment on our lives
 - b. We must take seriously our obligation to keep His dwelling place (church) pure
 - i. We must proceed in love
 - ii. We must proceed with great care
 - iii. We must proceed with humility

Christ and the Kingdoms of the World (March 29, 2009)

1. Main point: God is overthrowing the world's kingdoms and installing his King of kings, Jesus Christ
2. God's power to use the world's kingdoms
 - a. God decides the destiny of the world's rulers (Exod 4:21; 9:16; Prov 21:1; Ezra 6:22; Isa 44:28; Ezra 1:1)
 - b. God decides the destiny of the world's kingdoms (Job 12:23; Ps 22:28; 47:8; Exod 14:17; Ps 105:25; Josh 11:20; Isa 10:5)
 - c. God decides who will rule over each kingdom
 - i. "The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men" (Dan 4:17; also see 4:25; 5:21)
3. God's people among the world's kingdoms
 - a. God demonstrated his love by "saving" them from being the possession of other nations (Exod 14:13, 20)
 - b. God demonstrated his love by elevating one of his own to prominence in each case (Gen 41:41; Dan 2:48; Esth 2:17)
 - i. A lowly (humble) Israelite
 - ii. Endowed by God with special attributes
4. God's plan for the world's kingdoms
 - a. The Kingdom of God would be established (Dan 2:34-35, 44-45)
 - i. It would replace the world's kingdoms
 - ii. It would fill the earth
 - iii. It would endure forever
 - b. It would be ushered in by the Son of Man (Dan 7:9-27)

- i. He would be given authority to rule
 - ii. He would overthrow the arrogant enemy of God's people
 - iii. He would reign with God's people
- 5. Who would bring in the Kingdom of God . . . And what kind of kingdom would it be?
 - a. Upon the perfect revelation of Christ, we come to understand salvation in spiritual (rather than worldly) terms
 - i. We all (Jews, Gentiles) live in the kingdom of this world, belonging to Satan
 - ii. We need a savior
 - b. Let's have another look at those Old Testament themes . . .
- 6. God's plan for the world's kingdoms (part 2)
 - a. The Kingdom of God would be established (Mark 1:15)
 - i. It would replace the world's kingdoms (Rev 11:15)
 - ii. It would fill the earth (Matt 13:31-33)
 - iii. It would endure forever (Luke 1:33)
 - b. It would be ushered in by the Son of Man
 - i. He would be given authority to rule (Matt 28:18)
 - ii. He would overthrow the arrogant enemy of God's people (John 12:31; Rev 20:10)
 - iii. He would reign with God's people (Rev 20:6)
- 7. God's people among the world's kingdoms (part 2)
 - a. God demonstrated his love by "saving" them from being the possession of other nations (Acts 26:18; Luke 4:18)
 - b. God demonstrated his love by elevating one of his own to prominence in each case
 - i. A lowly (humble) Israelite (Matt 11:29)
 - ii. Endowed by God with special attributes (Acts 2:22)
- 8. God's power to use the world's kingdoms (part 2)
 - a. God decides the destiny of the world's rulers (Rev 20:10)
 - b. God decides the destiny of the world's kingdoms (Rev 11:15)
 - c. God decides who will rule over each kingdom (Rev 19:16)
- 9. Application
 - a. Let us praise God that He is sovereign over the world's kingdoms!
 - i. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude...saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev 19:6)
 - ii. "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev 11:15)
 - iii. "And he hath on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KINGS OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev 19:16)

Christ and Covenant

Christ the Heart of the Covenant (April 26, 2009)

1. Main point: The heart of God's covenant with his people is his grace as embodied in Jesus Christ
2. Common misconception: The heart of the old covenant (Judaism) is works, while the heart of the new covenant is grace
3. God's covenant of grace
 - a. God chose Abraham to be the father of a holy nation (Gen 12:1-3)
 - i. God promised he would be a God to the nation (Gen 17:7)
 - ii. God promised: land, descendants, blessings, other nations would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:1-14; 22:15-18)
 - iii. God swore by himself (Gen 15:7-21; 22:16)
4. God's acts of grace
 - a. God overcame anything that threatened his promises
 - i. Barrenness (Gen 17:17; 25:21; 29:31)
 - ii. Near death (Genesis 22)
 - iii. Lack of food, water (Gen 45:6-8; Exod 16:3-4; 17:1-6)
 - iv. Slavery (Exodus 12)
 - v. Ignorance (Genesis-Deuteronomy)
 - vi. Enemies (Joshua-Kings)
 - vii. Impurity (Exodus-Deuteronomy)
 - viii. Unfaithfulness (Deut 30:1-10; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 16; 36:16-30; Hos 1-3)
5. God's grace embodied in a person
 - a. Jesus Christ . . .
 - i. He brings an end to Israel's spiritual barrenness (Gal 4:26-28)
 - ii. He is the "lamb" that dies in Israel's place (John 1:29)
 - iii. He is the spiritual bread of life and living water (John 6:35; 7:38; 1 Cor 10:4)
 - iv. He delivers God's people from spiritual slavery (John 8:31-36)
 - v. He guides God's people in the way of wisdom (Matt 5-7; 11:28-30)
 - vi. He defeats the spiritual enemies of God's people (1 John 3:8; cf. Heb 2:14)
 - vii. He provides everlasting purity (Heb 10:10)
 - viii. He gives God's people the ability to be faithful (Rom 8:1-10; Gal 5:22-23)
 - b. The covenant of grace is fulfilled in Christ!
6. Application
 - a. Show God's grace to each other
 - i. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. . . . Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:9-11)
 - b. Take comfort in God's grace (Rom 8:28-39)

Christ the Requirement of the Covenant (May 17, 2009)

1. Main point: The requirement of God's covenant with his people is fulfilled in Jesus Christ
2. The requirement of the covenant
 - a. Righteousness = holding up one's end of a covenant
 - b. What does God require of his people?
 - i. Love God with all one's heart, soul and strength (Deut 6:4-5)
 - ii. Love neighbor (Lev 19:18)
 - c. Blessings and curses are promised (Deuteronomy 28)
3. Christ, the requirement
 - a. As prophet, Jesus proclaimed the requirement of the covenant (Matt 5-7; also see Deut 18:15-18)
 - b. As the true seed of Abraham, Jesus fulfilled Israel's requirement and wins the blessings (Isa 49:3; Gal 3:16; Gospel of Matthew)
 - i. Compare the similarities between 2 Chronicles 36:23 and Matthew 28:18-20
 - c. As the lamb of God, the curses were nailed to the cross with Him (Dan 9:24; Gal 3:13; Isa 53:4-5)
 - d. Once again, grace wins out in the end!

Christ the Embodiment of the Covenant (May 31, 2009)

1. Main point: All of the aspects of God's covenant of grace with Israel are bound up in a person, Jesus Christ
2. Recipe for a covenant
 - a. Ingredients
 - i. Promises
 - ii. Salvation
 - iii. Provision
 - iv. Commandments
 - v. Wisdom
 - vi. Ritual purity
 - vii. Feasts
 - b. Consumer notice (Deut 30:11-20)
3. Christ, the embodiment of the covenant
 - a. It's in there:
 - i. The promises (2 Cor 1:20)
 - ii. The salvation (John 3:16; Rom 10:9-10)
 - iii. The provision (John 6:35)
 - iv. The commandments (John 1:14; 14:6)
 - v. The wisdom (Matt 11:28)
 - vi. The ritual purity (Mark 7:19; Matt 26:26-28)
 - vii. The feasts (1 Cor 5:7; 15:20; John 7; Acts 2)
 - b. Consumer notice (Rom 10:5-13)
4. It all comes down to Jesus

- a. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9)

Christ the Remembrance of the Covenant (June 14, 2009)

1. Main point: God wants us to live with constant reminders of his love for us in Jesus Christ
2. A covenant of remembrance
 - a. Remember . . .
 - i. God’s faithfulness (Exod 13:11-16; Josh 4:7)
 - ii. To love and obey him (Deut 6:4-9; Mark 12:29; Ps 78:1-8)
 - iii. To thank him (Deut 8:6-10; Eph 5:19-20; 1 Thess 5:17-18)
 - b. Special events were created for remembering (Exod 23:14-19; Leviticus 16, 23; Num 28:16-29:40)
3. The new covenant
 - a. Jesus Christ brings . . .
 - i. The fulfillment of God’s plan of grace in a person!
 - ii. The requirements of the covenant fulfilled in a person!
 - iii. The covenant itself embodied in a person!
 - iv. The remembrance of God’s covenant in a person! (1 Cor 11:23-26)

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH AT HANOVER FELLOWSHIP CHURCH, HANOVER, PENNSYLVANIA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Chairperson: Dr. James M. Hamilton

Church members were taught a biblical theology of the church, with the aim that their commitment to the church would increase. Chapter 1 presents the purpose, goals, context, rationale, definitions, and limitations of the project.

Chapter 2 discusses the biblical theology of the church. This chapter develops the identity, nature, and mission of the church from a biblical-theological perspective.

Chapter 3 surveys alternative models for increasing commitment to the church. A discussion of how some models may compromise biblical ecclesiology is included.

Chapter 4 outlines the sermons and discipleship lessons used in the project. This chapter also includes preliminary results from the instruments used to measure change.

Chapter 5 provides an evaluation of the project goals, along with its strengths and weaknesses. This project contends that a valid method for increasing commitment in a church is to teach members a biblical perspective regarding their identity and roles.

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