

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Special Messages	Pastor/Teacher
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An Appropriate Apostolic Charge to the Church Today

This week I want to address the trend that continues to be used by various mega-churches of catering to the whims of the society at large. This is not new (remember the church in Chandler from a few years ago that garnered front-page attention from the local paper for its crass advertising of themes built around “sex”?). Going all the way back to the likes of Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller, more recent representatives include the enormously popular Joel Osteen (and his wildly successful bestseller *Your Best Life Now*), Rick Warren (with his equally successful book, *The Purpose Driven Life*), and Rob Bell (with four New York Times bestsellers, an award winning podcast, and a profile in the New Yorker, he toured with Oprah, and in 2011 Time Magazine named him one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World). All of them brazenly copycat their secular counterparts, like Tony Robbins and John Gray, in substituting pop psychology for theology. *World* magazine accurately identified this (20 years ago!) as simply a new brand of idolatry. “John Gray has sold millions of books about how men are from Mars and women are from Venus. Now he’s got religion in his latest chart-topper, *How to Get What You Want and Want What You Have* (HarperCollins). His message: ‘When you do your best, God does the rest.’ He explains how he spent nine years as a monk in Switzerland before dropping out, moving to California, and discovering the sacred path to *The New York Times* bestseller list: ‘Eventually, after asking God to show me the way, I learned that I could also ask God to show me the money.’ His relationship with God is the sort of nondenominational inoffensiveness that plays well on daytime television. Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Mother, Father, and Allah are all interchangeable. In fact, the Divine seems to be whatever gets you through the night. ‘If you are an atheist or an agnostic, maybe your higher, intuitive intelligence will suffice,’ Gray sermonizes, ‘Regardless of your particular orientation, when you let go after doing everything you can, you will receive what you want.’ When card-carrying psychoanalyst and ‘Board-Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress’ Gray isn’t teaching meditation, he’s dishing out yeah-whatever advice like ‘Money can’t buy happiness,’ ‘Don’t think, just do it,’ and ‘What we believe is what we create.’ The spin of *How to Get What You Want* has crawled out of the ooze left by Norman Vincent Peal, Robert Schuller, and a thousand and one PBS talking heads. Just believe in yourself, have good self-esteem, find ‘loving partnerships,’ give back to the community, and contentment will be yours. Mr. Gray sells because he parrots the spirit of the age: Religion must serve us as therapy and if God exists, He is just a hand-holder who helps get you what you wanted anyway. Where is modern skepticism and post-modern cynicism when we really need it?”¹

II Timothy 4:1-5 forms what John MacArthur, Jr. calls “the foundation of an excellent ministry.”² You will note that it follows the classic text on inspiration (II Timothy 3:16-17). What constitutes a *successful* ministry? This has become a driving issue in modern Evangelicalism, and there is no shortage of books on the subject. The quest for success today continues to revolve around being *relevant*. Contemporary practicality has transformed every aspect of Christian ministry, and to put it succinctly, it is a “Market-Driven Ministry.”³ The church must *sell* its product in the same way that a business sells its product; you must make both the producer and consumer happy. Marketing becomes the arbiter of truth - if it works, do it - that is the bottom

line. But *whose* bottom line is it? This mentality insists on real results and stresses using only the best insights and technologies available today, regardless of the source. The church, they insist, must continue to *modernize*, it must *innovate*, and it must *adapt* in order to survive. The emphasis is on methodology *not* theology. The Biblical model is something very different. What really matters is what God says, not what works.

I. *MINISTERING IN THE AGE OF POST-MODERNISM.* The major problem with the market-driven ministry philosophy is that it will always be a *product* of the times. It will always appeal to the very worst mood of our age. “It caters,” writes MacArthur, “to people whose first love is themselves and who care not for God - unless they can have Him without disrupting their selfish lifestyles. Promise such people a religion that will allow them to be comfortable in their materialism and self-love, and they will respond in droves.”⁴

A. *How Do We Define Success?* Did the Apostle Paul subscribe to the “give-people-what-they-want” theory that is still so prevalent in our churches today? This concept is usually called preaching to *felt needs*. Many “user-friendly” (a phrase taken from one of George Barna’s book titles) churches have deliberately subordinated Biblical preaching and worship to what is called “evangelistic worship”, which in turn is connected with entertainment, and by so doing have subverted the traditional defining features of the church. By catering to *felt needs*, what is really done is preaching to selfish and idolatrous cravings. “What will be the *felt needs* of people who love themselves, money, and pleasure? Our job is not to preach to felt needs, but to expose such felt needs as sinful cravings that must be supplanted by Christ.”⁵ It should be noted that “success”, at least as we have come to understand it - as something *external* - is never a valid goal in the ministry.

B. *Pursuing The Divine Standard.* This was Paul’s concept of success - not the goal of external success, but Biblical excellence - doing the will of God even if it is unpopular and regardless of consequences.

II. *THE FOUNDATION OF A BIBLICAL MINISTRY.* In vv. 1-5, we have Paul’s definition of Biblical ministry. There are nine definitive reminders from Paul to Timothy. If this is not our model, we have departed from the Apostolic one.

A. *Remember Your Calling: Paul’s Charge.* The Apostle uses the solemn verb DIAMARTUROMAI. It is a very strong word, found three times in the Pastorals (I Timothy 5:21; II Timothy 2:14; and here in II Timothy 4:1). The word reinforced the binding obligation to make known the message and will of God.⁶ Note in particular the stress on the centrality of God. Ministry must be guided *not* by what people want, but by what God says! (cf. Romans 14:10-12; II Corinthians 5:10).

B. *Preach the Word.* What kind of ministry pleases God? Obedience to this simple command, “Preach the Word” (v. 2). What does this involve? Proclaiming (not sharing) the *whole* counsel of God (Acts 20:27). The message the minister of the Gospel is *required* to preach is often offensive. Christ is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Romans 9:33; I Peter 2:8). The message of the cross is a stumbling block to some (Galatians 5:11) and mere foolishness to others (I Corinthians 1:23). What was Timothy to preach? The Word of God - the God-breathed Scriptures (3:16, 17). He is to master this (II Timothy 2:15), to devote himself to this as his *major* task (I Timothy 4:13). This was Paul’s calling (Colossians 1:25; cf. I Corinthians 2:1-2).

C. *Be Faithful In and Out of Season.* Preach the Word, Timothy, regardless of the smiles and frowns of the people, regardless of the times - be faithful, Timothy, to your calling (I Corinthians 4:1-2). Preaching in the Biblical sense is not popular today; it hasn’t been for some time now, and besides, theology is irrelevant. Who needs it? Paul told Timothy *he* needed it.

D. *Reprove, Rebuke, and Exhort.* Notice that this has to do with the tone of Timothy’s preaching. Preaching that fails to confront and correct sin through the Word of God does *not* meet people’s real need. It may make them feel good, and they may respond enthusiastically to the preacher, but it is not Biblical preaching.

E. Don't Compromise in Difficult Times. Timothy is warned; the time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine, but will oppose it openly and will gather around them a *great number* (note this emphasis!) of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will deliberately turn away from the truth because of *their* own desires. Ear-tickling preaching is an abomination, and Timothy is not to accommodate his preaching to it.

NOTE: In v. 3, Paul mentions a certain group of “men”. To whom does this refer? Is he talking about the world or people in the church. Since the world has never cared for the preaching of sound doctrine, and Paul is clearly addressing a situation involving people who have been exposed to preaching, this has to refer to people in the church. A very similar reference is found in Acts 20:29. This is exactly the condition of churches today, and the market-driven philosophy of so many of them says, “Give the people what they want!” Remember the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai? The people desired a calf to worship, and a ministerial golden-calf maker is readily found (Exodus 32). “This isn’t happening today,” you say? Evangelicalism has abandoned its heritage and has embraced the spirit of the age. Look about you; look at the Christian TV programs - what do you see? Christians madly pursuing extra-biblical revelation in the form of visions, dreams, and prophecies. Evangelical preachers and theologians blatantly denying the reality of hell and openly embracing universalism. A massive re-orientation has taken place in Evangelicalism, and hardly any doctrine of historic Christianity has been left unaffected. The attributes of God have been redefined; God is no longer all-knowing - He learns like the rest of us. God can’t be all-powerful or else bad things wouldn’t happen to “good” people. The Spirit of Christ can speak just as easily in other world religions as He can through the Bible. This is being advocated by a growing number of Evangelicals. Just as bad is the larger number of Evangelical churches who have lost all interest in doctrine and the need for teaching and preaching the *major* themes of Christianity: the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the nature of the atonement, justification by faith, the sinfulness of man - the church has virtually gone mute on these themes. The Biblical teaching on the role of women, homosexuality, and abortion has been discarded as being culturally conditioned. Music has become the focal point of why people choose a church, and, in many cases, people want to worship not the Lord God of Scripture but their worship! Modern Evangelicalism has fallen into the old liberalism that H. Richard Niebuhr described as believing in “a God without wrath bringing men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a Cross.”⁷

- F. Be Sober in All Things.** This has reference to being self-controlled and attentive. The Greek word NĒPHŌ describes a state of mental alertness. The same verb is found in I Thessalonians 5:6, 8 to denote a watchful and alert attitude. A minister should be characterized by being steadfast and stable, not changing with every cultural shift that blows his way.
- G. Endure Hardship.** The ministry is hard. It involves dealing with difficult issues and sometimes difficult people. It demands hard work - not business administration, which is often the lot of a pastor - but the hard work of studying and teaching the Scriptures. Paul had previously counseled Timothy on this subject (II Timothy 2:1, 3).
- H. Do the Work of an Evangelist.** Part of the duty of a faithful pastor is to reach out beyond the walls of the local church to people outside the church, and not with a message of compromise, but of confrontation. Timothy is urged to be solemn, persuasive, and Biblical in confronting unbelief.
- I. Fulfill Your Ministry.** The NIV has “discharge”. “Fulfill” is the ESV translation of the word PLĒROPHOREŌ which means, “to accomplish”. Timothy is exhorted to devote himself wholeheartedly to the task of “preaching the Word”. There is no place for compromise, timidity or delay, and there is no need for fear because this is the kind of ministry that pleases the Lord.

CONCLUSION: Gary Gilley, who contributed to a book from Crossway that I co-edited with Ron Gleason, has written on this subject with great insight. He says, “Many within the new-paradigm church would loudly proclaim that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But they have redefined salvation. Salvation is not simply, under the new gospel, the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of

righteousness. It is not a deliverance from the wrath of God upon a deserving and rebellious people. The new Gospel is a liberation from low self-esteem, a freedom from emptiness and loneliness, a means of fulfillment and excitement, a way to receive our heart's desires, a means of meeting our needs. The old gospel is about God; the new gospel is about us. The old gospel is about sin; the new gospel is about needs. The old gospel is about our need for righteousness; the new gospel is about our need for fulfillment. The old gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing; the new gospel is attractive. Many are flocking to the new gospel but it is altogether questionable how many are actually being saved."⁸ Faithfulness, godliness, and spiritual commitment are the virtues that God esteems. External things, such as affluence, numbers, money, or even positive responses, have never been the Biblical measure of success in the ministry. Size does not necessarily signify God's blessing - nor does popularity. Church of the Redeemer, by God's grace, will seek to be faithful to a ministry that pleases God, and I seek your prayers and support to that end.

Endnotes

1. *World* (June 5, 1999), p. 27.
2. John MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of The Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Crossway Books, 1993), p. 29. This important book has helped shape this particular sermon.
3. MacArthur, op. cit., p. 28.
4. MacArthur, op. cit., p. 41.
5. Michael Scott Horton, "Corinthian Distraction", *Modern Reformation* (Mar/Apr, 1993), p. 23.
6. *Dictionary of New Testament Theology III*, ed. Colin Brown (Zondervan, 1971), p. 1044.
7. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Harper & Row, 1937), pp. 191-192.
8. G. Gilley, *This Little Church Went to Market: Is the Modern Church Reaching Out or Selling Out?* (Evangelical Press, 2005), p. 74.