

# MBC MEN'S STUDY: LEADERSHIP 4

## Class 2 - Ecclesiology: *What is the Mission of the Church?*

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### PURPOSE OF THIS CLASS

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- Before getting into this specific book, I want to lay out the framework for this specific class.
- My hope is that when we are done today, you will not only have a robust understanding of the *actual* purpose of the church, but also be able to recognize counterfeits which are present in our current society.
- There are many opinions in our present age as to what the church is to be, many are taking their start from people and movements that are simply not Biblical.
- You, as men in the church, need to be able to not only recognize when something is not right, but then be able to move yourself and shepherd your family in the Biblical direction.
- I want to walk through the book, especially the first couple chapters, and then really start to put some meat on the bones of the teaching. We will end by practically applying what we read to our own life.

### INTRODUCTION

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- The mission of the church is something that has been debated over the past century more than ever in the history of the church.
  - As we will see, this really was not a huge issue (though certainly on the fringes since the beginning) until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of the social gospel and then into *easy-believeism*.
- In an effort to maintain unity in the church, much of the broader evangelicalism has given up on hard doctrinal stances in favor of unity (false unity).
  - We no longer have enough men who are willing to take a stand on doctrinal beliefs/positions in the face of public ridicule.
  - In an effort to make the church *more relatable to the world*, we have lost the point of the church.
- As Sproul<sup>1</sup> states “In the twentieth century there was what has been labeled “the ecumenical movement.” This was an attempt through the World Council of Churches and other bodies to move in the direction of forming or reforming denominational splinter groups into one centralized, ecclesiastical body. The whole goal of the ecumenical movement was to restore unity to the visible church. One of the things that we saw

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *What is the church?* pp. 2-3.

as a result of this push toward unity was an increasing number of mergers between denominations that formerly were divided.”

- The only goal was *not* to glorify God, it was *not* to disciple believers nor was it to take the good news of Christ to the ends of the world. It was simply to *visibility unify* anything which called itself a church.
- The unintended consequences of this were **pluralism** (allowing a wide view of doctrines to exist within and under a single body) and **church splits** (in an effort to preserve the unity, because there were no doctrinal beliefs, those who wanted hard stances left and started their own churches).
- Today, what we face off against is plain ole liberalism/progressive Christianity.
  - “...resulting of the impact of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment on the church and the advent of what was called nineteenth-century liberalism. In the past, to be liberal simply meant to be free and open. In and of itself, the term liberal describes a virtue. But when you put that suffix -ism on the end, it refers to a particular school of theology that has had massive influence on the visible church across denominational lines.”<sup>2</sup>
  - Instead of leaving mainstream evangelicalism, “...the vast majority of the liberals...sought to maintain their standing in the visible church by capturing seminaries, colleges, boards, and agencies of the major denominations. By and large they succeeded. So at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a catastrophic struggle in America that was known as the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy.”<sup>3</sup>
- It is important to understand that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc 1:9). What we are seeing today with churches pushing for a “less-gospel” approach to the mission of the church has not only been brewing for the past 100 years but has been slowly creeping into churches that we would consider sister churches.
  - This is largely due to the teaching at seminaries. Our own Grand Rapids Theological Seminary now offers an MA<sup>4</sup> in “nonprofit leadership for social justice.”
  - This is at the seminary level, being taught to men and women who are going to be going into the church and leading people down these paths.
    1. Here is part of their description<sup>5</sup> “Meaningful responses to human suffering are grounded in acknowledging the inherent complexity and enduring presence of injustice. It is also essential to understand the ways in which injustice shapes individuals and communities. Furthermore, in order to make real changes, we must create new, just systems.”

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 11

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cornerstone.edu/programs/ma-nonprofit-leadership-for-social-justice/> 09/03/2021

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

2. At the time of this writing, there was no gospel mentioned in their curriculum for this degree. But, to their credit, there is one class on Biblical Theology of Justice, but it is described as “This course will aid students in constructing and enacting a biblical theology of public justice by critically examining various hermeneutical approaches to Scripture, engaging the Bible’s vision of God’s justice in the Old and New Testaments, and discerning how this vision relates to Christian embodiment of justice in contemporary culture.”<sup>6</sup>

- I bring this up, not to bash a seminary, but to show you what is being taught as the mission of the church to 300-400 students each year.
- GRTS is not alone, this degree and/or idea is taught throughout many, many mainstream seminaries around the country. The “new” church is no longer worried about getting the teaching of the Word right, but about how it looks to the world.
- What do we think happens when men and women are being trained with this worldview and then sent out into the church to minister and to lead?

## DEFINING MISSION

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- It is easy in our day and age to conflate the mission of the church with the mission of individual believers who make up the church.
- As DeYoung<sup>7</sup> points out, “One could make a case that glorifying God and enjoying him forever is the mission of the church, because that is our chief end as redeemed believers.”
- He goes on, saying<sup>8</sup> that perhaps it is either “loving God and loving neighbor” or maybe “trust and obey.”
- The question he poses is fundamental to how we answer the question of mission...*is mission simply a synonym for living a faithful Christian life?*
- As DeYoung<sup>9</sup> further points out “...mission is that primary thing you set out to accomplish.”
- The working definition that DeYoung<sup>10</sup> uses is “what is the specific task or purpose that the church is *sent into the world to accomplish?*”
- **How does this align with your personal understanding of the mission of the church?**
- On pages 22-23, DeYoung lists some of the things they want and do not want to convey regarding the mission of the church.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> DeYoung, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> P. 19

<sup>10</sup> p. 20

- Notably, on page 23 he says “We want the church to remember that there is something worse than death and something better than human flourishing. If we hope only for renewed cities and restored bodies in this life, we are of all people most to be pitied.”
- We would do well to let this statement sink in for a moment. ***If the best we have to offer people are cleaner streets, better housing and quality food and water, we should be pitied.***
  1. Why is this? Because we do not truly believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- It is important to keep this in mind when defining the mission of the church or the mission of each individual believer.
- We should not be those with the attitude of “let it burn!” nor should we think that if we do not personally alleviate poverty, somehow we are going to get a harsher punishment.
- On page 26, DeYoung points out “we will argue that the mission of the church is summarized in the Great Commission passages—the climactic marching orders Jesus issues at the ends of the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts. We believe the church is sent into the world to witness to Jesus by proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations. This is our task. This is our unique and central calling.”
  - Some of the key components in what DeYoung said are worth noting.
    1. This was Jesus’ *marching orders*, but He gave them at the end of the gospels and then at the beginning of Acts. **Why?**
    2. The church is sent into the world...**what does being sent as a church mean?**
    3. **Why is this unique and central to our calling?**
- I think it is also helpful to point out what he says on page 27 “Though we do not believe that the mission of the church is to build the kingdom or to partner with God in remaking the world, this does not mean we are against cultural engagement.”
  - I think this is a very important point to make. As Bible believing Christians, we know how it is all going to end. We know that the world is going to burn (2 Pet 3:7, 10) and be made new (Rev 21; Isa 65). We know that everything is under the control of God (Eph 1:11; Pro 16:9).
  - This should not keep us out of the culture but actively engaging it.
  - DeYoung makes a final remark, ending chapter 1 “As the church loves the world so loved by God, we will work to relieve suffering wherever we can, but especially eternal suffering.”
    1. While I agree with what DeYoung is saying, it is important that we do not think of social actions and the gospel as two wings of the same bird.
    2. Commenting on this very risky or delicate issue, Joel James and Brian Biedebach wrote<sup>11</sup> “It’s a dicey line that authors like [John] Stott and [Timothy] Keller have drawn for the

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<sup>11</sup> Joel James and Brian Biedebach, *Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions*, p. 5.

church to walk: "We're going to keep the gospel the main thing and focus the church on social action; in fact, in a sense, social action is the gospel too." In theory, it's a noble blend of word and deed, of transformational truth and dynamic love. Naturally, however, the further one pushes, the closer one gets to the place where social involvement ceases to be distinctly Christian and even starts to supplant that which is distinctly Christian. It's no small wonder that David Bosch calls this issue "one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of mission today."

- I am certainly not saying what DeYoung said was wrong or inaccurate, but the truth remains, we must not sit in our churches and do nothing. Yet, there is *always* a drift from the gospel when social issues are put on the same level.

## **KNOWING WHAT THE MISSION IS...WHAT ARE WE SENT TO DO?**

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- We are going to briefly skim chapter 2, looking at some of the highlights.
- After establishing the historical position of what Jesus did here on earth, DeYoung states<sup>12</sup> "If Luke 4 sets the tone for the mission of the church, then the center of the church's mission should be preaching the gospel."
- We should never discredit Jesus' miracles or think they were not a major part in His ministry. It has been said that the vast majority of the Galilee Valley was illness and demon free after Jesus was done there.
- But, Jesus came in to the world to "seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10), not just heal people.
- Jesus did not come to change nor shift the cultural structure. Make no mistake, the Roman government and social organization was anything but fair. Jesus could have brought it all down and then built it back up to be the best and most fair system in the history of mankind. Yet, He chose not to.
  - Why? Because He knew (knows) that the greatest need of any person is not to have a full belly or feel like they have justice...it is to be born again.
- When we continue from the Gospels into the book of Acts, we see the early church continue the mission of Jesus. They were not seeking out ways to change the unfair culture, but to spread the Good News.
- One of my absolute favorite conversations in the Bible is from Acts 1:6-9 "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

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<sup>12</sup> P. 38

- Listen to what is happening here. The disciples were ready for Christ to come back and establish the righteous kingdom. They had social and political things on their minds. They were ready to get back to being God's favored.
- What did Jesus say?
- It is very important to also mention what DeYoung states on page 49 regarding the Great Commission "This does not mean that the church in Acts is one big evangelistic rally or inductive Bible study. We see the church devoted to the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer, as well as the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42)."
- The mission of the church is not only to go out and share the gospel. It is also about making disciples (Matt 28:18-20) and taking care of those who are in the church.
- One point of the church that is often overlooked is the result of being faithful to the Word.
  - On page 51 "Everywhere the Word goes there is opposition, but everywhere the Word goes, some believe. So Paul and Barnabas proclaim the Word in Cyprus and at Antioch in Pisidia, at Iconium and Lystra."
  - As Paul is out preaching the word, he is also strengthening the disciples (Acts 14:21-23). He is literally making disciples and seeing them grow through the teaching of the Word.
  - This means that Paul's (and ours) primary mission was to preach the gospel, but it did not stop there. The Great Commission does not stop there, it says to make disciples by "teaching them to observe all" that Jesus has commanded.
- That is what the church is called to do. We absolutely change society, but not through worldly means. We preach the gospel and disciple people, and they begin to live in line with what the Scriptures teach.
- If we do nothing but teach people how to live rightly, we are doing nothing more than attempting to reform the flesh by teaching morality.

## **KEEPING THE MAIN THING...THE MAIN THING**

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- Starting on page 106, Gilbert talks about *putting it all together*. This is a helpful section that explains what the gospel is and what it is not. It is helpful for two reasons, firstly we want to make sure we are sharing the true gospel, secondly, we want to make sure our churches are not drifting from the mission which Christ has set forth for her.
- One point he brings up is "the gospel of the kingdom necessarily includes the gospel of the cross."
  - We cannot proclaim the kingdom blessings from Christ without telling people how they are to enter into the kingdom.

- Christ was always clear...*Repent!* He would tell people. If we are not telling people about how to enter into the kingdom, we are simply giving them a description of what they cannot have.
- We must come to the understanding unwavering belief that it is only through the gospel that one can truly experience real blessings from God, both in this life and the next.
  - If this is our driving force, we will never put social action above spiritual necessity.

## **How the church is to handle the social justice movement**

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- Not only has the recent surge in social justice caused the church to move off their Biblical mission, but it has also brought much confusion and division into the church.
- Take for instance John Stott, he helped to guide a 1982 report that has forever changed the mission of the church. The report that he helped draft recommends that the “church make social action and evangelism equal partners in fulfilling of the Great Commission...They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus who not only preached the gospel but fed the hungry and healed the sick. In his ministry, kerygma (proclamation) and diakonia (service) went hand in hand. His words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be ours.”<sup>13</sup>
- Take for example Eric Mason’s charge to the church in 2018, in his book *Woke Church* “To apply this we must be awakened to the reality of implicit and explicit racism and injustice in our society. Until then, our prophetic voice on these matters will be anemic and silent. Being woke is to be aware. Being woke is to acknowledge the truth. Being woke is to be accountable. Being woke is to be active. This is the call of God on the church and on every believer.”<sup>14</sup>
  - Josh Buice responds to this assertion “To make the claim that the mission of the church is to be “woke” is to be guilty of false advertising at best and egregious mission drift at worst. Furthermore, Jesus doesn’t need to ride the wave of pragmatic cultural trends in order to complete his mission through the Church. I would further argue that Jesus was not “woke” in his earthly ministry and doesn’t need that label for his Church today.”<sup>15</sup>
  - We are being pressured in the church, from the culture, to be more active in dealing with and alleviating the perceived injustices of from our culture and the country’s past.
- No one would disagree that individual believers, who are part of a church, should be compassionate toward people who are actually oppressed.

<sup>13</sup> Joel James and Brian Biedebach, *Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions*, pp 4-5

<sup>14</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> <https://founders.org/2019/04/11/the-race-issue-how-social-justice-is-disrupting-the-church-and-confusing-the-gospel/>

- Disagreement abounds when the discussion turns to how the corporate church should engage with these issues.
- We must also be careful when defining oppressed people. Simply because someone is the minority does not qualify them to be oppressed.
- Now, falling under the guise of oppressed people are those from the LGBTQ community.<sup>16</sup> It is because their choice of lifestyle has not been accepted by over 90% of people that they feel they are oppressed.
  1. For the record, we do not condone violence against such people, but we would not agree in theory or practice with their lifestyle choice.
- Social justice has no place in the corporate business of the church. The church's mission is not to alleviate the poor and hungry. It is not to make sure that everyone has an equal voice in society or that everyone has a level playing field.
- What are we as a church to do regarding the social justice agenda?<sup>17</sup>
  - Keep in mind that it is appropriate for Christians who are members of a church to do all they can to encourage the making and enforcing of laws which protect those who are victims of various heinous crimes. But that is not for the *church to do*...the church is to:
    - **Exalt God**
      1. Psalm 95:6 ~ Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.
      2. God and God alone is to be worshipped and celebrated in the church. When our focus is on anything else, we are in gross idolatry and most likely not even a church.
    - **Equip the Saints**
      1. Ephesians 4:12 ~ for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ
        - We discussed this last time we were together, but it is helpful to understand further. As the church is equipping men and women, they are then doing the work of service...both inside and outside the church walls.
        - They are evangelizing, they are making disciples, they are bringing the gospel to downcast areas where the work of the Lord can shine.
    - **Edify One Another**
      1. Romans 14:19 ~ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/10/06/491052/state-lgbtq-community-2020/> 09/05/2021

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mbcmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Social-Justice-Evaluation.pdf> 09/03/2021



- When we meet up, we need to encourage one another. We need to make sure that we are following Christ with our hearts, minds, and actions.
- **Evangelize the Lost**
  1. Matthew 28:19 ~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
    - As we have discussed previously, this is what Jesus has commanded us to do and how the message of the gospel spreads.
- We have to make sure that our primary focus is not on fighting these heinous crimes as oppression, abortion, racism, sex trafficking. These are certainly not unimportant issues, *but they are secondary to gospel*.
- Adopting the social justice agenda causes the church to lose its focus and leads to mission drift.
  - Evangelical missions in Africa is changing. Or more accurately, it has changed. In the past, the bulk of the theologically conservative missionaries in Africa came to do church planting and leadership training. No longer. Today many of the new missionaries being sent are focused on social relief, with the church tacked on as a theological addendum. By all appearances there has been a mega-shift in evangelical missions away from church planting and leadership training and toward social justice or social action.<sup>18</sup>
  - They are obviously talking about doing overseas missions work, but the point is still the same. When the church loses its focus on the main issue of the gospel, they are going to drift.
    1. Things like church planting...which includes sharing the gospel, discipleship, striving for holiness, etc....lose all their importance to the people's perceived needs.
  - If the missionaries who are being sent out are focused on these things, it is a sure sign that their churches are as well.
- We are essentially sending men and women around the world to do nothing more than feed and clothe people. The urgent regard for the spiritual wellbeing has been lost. People are perishing in their sins because we no longer believe the gospel.

## **HOW ARE YOU FULFILLING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH?**

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- In an effort to not keep this at the high theological or theoretical level, we must be able to apply this theological framework to our normal church setting.
- In chapter 9, DeYoung does a great job of really delineating what it means to be a believer and to make sure that you are doing the works that God has set out for you to do.

<sup>18</sup> Joel James and Brian Biedebach, *Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions*, p. 1

- As he explains on page 223, “We are of the strong opinion that the Bible teaches that we Christians are to be a people of both declaration and demonstration, and that our churches are to be communities of both declaration and demonstration.”
- I want to close by looking at Philippians 1:27-30. Paul gives us some really great instruction for the church as the individual believers that make it up.
- Remember that this was written to a church in Philippi. Paul was instructing them how to walk and conduct themselves in the midst of a hostile culture. Before Paul got to verse 27, he references the gospel message in verses 5, 7, 12 and 16 and then caps it off in verse 27 mentioning it two more times.

### **Firstly, what is the main mission that we need to busy ourselves with? We must have a robust and thorough proclamation of the gospel.**

- It is only by this message that any Satanic strongholds will be defeated. Things like racism, sexism, poverty and any other injustice. It is a spiritual problem and must be addressed accordingly.
- We must be eager to preach the gospel to all, regardless of their creeds, race, or lifestyle choice.
- Steven Cole says<sup>19</sup> “I’m not denying the need to help hurting people deal with problems or to help get fractured families back together. Wounded people need some healing before they go out to the front lines. But it seems to me that we’ve shifted our focus onto ourselves to such a degree that, instead of viewing ourselves as God’s army, the American church has come to see itself as a branch of the self-help movement. We need to keep the goal in view, that hurting people need healing so that they can be deployed into the battle of reaching lost people with the gospel. Thus, in order to fulfill our mission, first we must focus on it. The church is here to proclaim the faith of the gospel.”

### **Secondly, the purpose of the church is seen in the activity of its members.**

- The church itself is to equip its members for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). What is supposed to happen after that equipping? It is time to live out what was taught.
- This is what Paul gets at in Philippians 1:27, we need to *conduct ourselves in a manner worth of the gospel of Christ*. This is not just proclaiming the gospel only, but also seeking out ways to serve one another.
- We are part of a different country and need to act as such. We should be a strange and peculiar people to the onlooking world.
- We have different purposes, goals and motivations.
  - We must bring the light of the truth to bear in a world blinded by sin.
- We should not blend in so much with the world that we lose our heavenly distinction.

<sup>19</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-9-christian-mission-and-how-fulfill-it-philippians-127-30> 09/05/2021

- This is what has happened too much over time. Churches have become so entangled with the world that they cease to be a tool for God and simply become a country club.
- We should not be so.

### **Thirdly, we should be striving for unity.**

- Within the church, there should be a strong focus and attitude towards unity. We all know that nothing divided can stand. Furthermore, if we are not united in our beliefs in the church, how is the onlooking world ever going to take us seriously.
  - To be sure, this does not mean that we give up our Biblical positions, but it does mean that we seek reconciliation with one another. Correct doctrine certainly divides.
  - We would stand side by side with our brothers who are from the a-mil camp or even those who are continuationists. But we would draw the line with those who are not inline with our tier one beliefs or who do not hold to the Scriptures as we do.

### **Fourth, we should be ready for the battle and subsequent persecution.**

- Paul does not mince words. If we are going to fulfill the mission of the church we are going to face harsh persecution.
- We should not be alarmed, or surprised when people simply do not like us or our stance. As we are fulfilling the mission of the church, there are going to be great spiritual obstacles in our path. There simply must be.
- Read what Paul says regarding suffering in verse 29 “for to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...”
  - We have been granted, not only the great grace to believe but to also suffer for Christ. We should take that as a great privilege, to be counted worthy to be with Christ.

### **How to view the distinction between the church and the Christian**

- I found pages 232 – 239 very helpful in distinguishing between what the church as an institution is to be doing and what the individual Christian is to be doing.
- On page 233 he says “There is a difference between the individual Christian and the local church, and therefore we can’t just say that whatever we see commanded of the individual Christian is also commanded of the local church.”
  - We are, as believers, commanded to do many things...but these things are not the mission of the church. You should think of it this way...the church is there to make sure the individuals are prepared and trained to accomplish the mission they have been given.
- With this line between the church and the Christian, how are we fulfilling the mission of the church?