

Gold Country Baptist Church Leadership Philosophy of Ministry and Doctrinal Convictions

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Introduction

This encapsulates in brief form some of the key elements of what we as Elders believe to be a *biblical* philosophy of ministry. It is not "our" philosophy in the sense of our experience or opinion, but our endeavor to be faithful to what is clear in God's Word by prescription, principle, and pattern. It is not "our" ministry, nor is it any man's, but as part of *God's* work in *Christ's* church, we the Elders of Gold Country Baptist Church strive to honor Him in prayerfully and lovingly leading His precious local church here.

The Word of God

Above and beyond everything as the source and supreme authority, the *only* authority is God's Word as revealed in the 66 books that make up our Bible. Any aspect of ministry within this paper or even in the largest or most respected of ministries must subordinate itself to the scrutiny of Scripture (Acts 17:11, I Thessalonians 5:21) and be refined or even replaced where biblical truth warrants. The validity of any ministry philosophy is not pragmatic success, but faithfulness to the Word. Having a high view of God and His Word is the greatest need of the church, and a church or individual will be spiritually strong or weak in proportion to this view.

The Word of God in the original is inspired, infallible, inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative for all of life (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 19:7-12, 2 Peter 1:20-21, etc.). There is no need to turn to secular men to solve man's spiritual problems (2 Peter 1:3), it is God's whole counsel in scripture rightly understood which has the power over sin (Hebrews 4:12, Romans 1:16) rather than the counsel of the ungodly which we should avoid (Psalm 1:1). We believe a truly biblical counseling model seeks to meet man's spiritual needs by God's all-sufficient Word, rather than integrating psychology or psychiatry to solve man's sin problems. Ministry begins with those who "tremble at God's Word" (Isa. 66:2), who reverence it, cherish it, submit to it, interpret it carefully and prayerfully, accurately handle it, apply it, protect it, and pass on its truth to others.

Ministry Defined

The NT word often translated "ministry" (*diakonia*) is a word that basically means service. Although there are requirements for the office of *diakonos* (aka "servant-leader", cf. I Timothy 3), all believers are servants or ministers in the primary sense of the Greek word. Any right-hearted work of service Christians give to each other is ministry, including prayer, changing diapers in the nursery, taking care of the facilities, running the sound board, working behind the scenes, etc. It is not necessarily helpful to see the pastor as "*the* minister" when every Christian is a minister biblically in a fundamental sense. The grammar of Ephesians 4:11-12 indicates the saints are to be doing the work of the ministry, the pastor or teacher is an equipper to this end, but is not to do all (or even most) of the ministry. A strong "clergy-laity" (neither of which is a biblical word) separation is something the full-time pastoral minister(s) should bring back to biblical balance and engage the giftedness of the saints to all be a part of the work of ministering to one another and serving and building up the body to maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Ministry, then is not a high and lofty official title, but is the privilege of all believers in service to their beloved Master, Jesus Christ. This is not to minimize the function of full-time occupational ministers, but there is equal danger in minimizing or marginalizing the more common volunteer ministry at the heart of a healthy church.

What is the *purpose* of biblical ministry? What is the purpose of the church? To narrow the question further, perhaps we all should also ask what is *our* purpose and part in God's ultimate purpose? But first, what is God's purpose?

The Glory of God

It all starts and ends with God. The chief end of man is to glorify God. This is also God's chief end, and this goal is the ultimate purpose for everything. Isaiah 43:7 reveals that the reason God created us is for His glory. Verse 20 says that even the animals glorify God. In fact the whole universe is designed to give glory to God (Psalm 19:1). Colossians 1:16 says "all things were created by him and *for Him*"

At the core of this is a great theme of the Bible - the Supremacy of God. It is for God's glory, for God's sake, for God's name and His self that God does everything, and for this end all things must be aimed and focused.

Isaiah 43:25 "I am he who blots out your transgression *for my own sake*"
Isaiah 48:9-11 put it like this, "*For my name's sake* I defer my anger, *for the sake of my praise* I restrain it for you ... *For my own sake, for my own sake* I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."

Psalms 23:3 "He leads me in paths of righteousness *for His name's sake*"

Ps 31:3 "For *thy name's sake* you will lead me and guide me"

Ps 106:7 "Nevertheless he saved them *for his name's sake*"

1 Sam 12:20-22 explains, "the Lord will not cast away his people *for his great name's sake.*"

Ezekiel 20:14, "I acted *for the sake of my name*, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations"

Ezekiel 36:22-23,32 puts it like this: "Thus says the Lord God, '*It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name ... It is not for your sake that I will act,*' says the Lord God. 'Let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded'"

The great motive, end, and aim of all God does is not man-centered, but is for the sake of the glory of God – our majestic Lord is the only being in the universe worthy and deserving of such attention. It is only when He is the blazing and massive center of our spiritual universe that all the other "planets" in our life will be aligned as well. God alone is supreme and supremely satisfying to those who join Him in this focus.

Glorifying God in Prayer

A biblical ministry of prayer must therefore be God-centered as well. Prayer must have a place of primacy in the church and should exalt God rather than focus on man.

Matt. 6:9, 13 “Hallowed be *thy name* ... *thine* is the kingdom and the power *and the glory*”

Jer. 14:7, 21 “Although our iniquities testify against us, O Lord, *act for thy name’s sake* ... Do not despise us, for *thy own name’s sake*; Do not disgrace the throne of *thy glory*

Ps 25:11 “*For Thy name’s sake* O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great”

Ps 70:9 “Help us, O God of our salvation, *for the glory of Thy name*; and deliver us, and forgive our sins *for thy names’ sake*”

Prayer should be for the sake of *God’s name and glory*, not because we deserve it, but because His name deserves it; that should be our prayer motive as well.

Glorifying God in Evangelism

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men *so that they may see* your good works *and glorify your Father* who is in heaven”

The Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, and teaching them to *observe* everything Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). The church must be about this in its community (local outreach) as well as in the nations, through some level of missionary involvement - supplication, support, short-term missions, or sending / going long-term. We agree with the premise of the book subtitled *The Supremacy of God in Missions* that the ultimate purpose of missions in the church is grounded in the supremacy of God and man's happiness in desiring God alone, not in the means itself. It is all about God, not man.

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over ... missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”

(John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 43).

Ephesians 1 describes God's work in salvation 3 times as being for His glory or "to the praise of *His glory*." The sovereignty of God in salvation does not make evangelism unnecessary, it makes it more effective. It is a great encouragement that God *will* save His own through His Word and Spirit, not by our might or power. We just need to be faithful in proclaiming, although it is not ultimately up to us or our powers of persuasion or cleverness; results *will* come in God's way and timing. God will save whom He will but there is no greater privilege in the Christian life than to be used by God in this process (Romans 10:15), and any Christian who will not evangelize needs to repent and become obedient. The terminology "gift of evangelism" can be misleading since the emphasis of the NT is on the *responsibility* of all believers to proclaim the good news (*euaggelizo*) regardless of giftedness, length of time you've been a Christian, etc. This Greek verb for “evangelize” is used of what all Christ's disciples did (Luke 9:6), and was the continual mark of the early church (Acts 5:42, 8:4, 8:12, 8:25, 8:35, 8:40, 10:36, 11:20, 13:32, 14:7, 14:15, 14:21, 15:35, 16:10, 17:18, etc.).

There is no gift called "evangelism" strictly speaking, in fact this noun does not even exist in the Bible, but there rather is a command to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). Besides the unique foundational figures in the early church who actually had this as a title (Acts 21:8 is the only example of such referenced in Ephesians 4:11), the epistles that mention the continuing gifts within the body do not list evangelism as a gift. It is better to see it as the *responsibility* of all, without ignoring the fact that God has specially equipped some more than others for greater effectiveness in this area. Evangelism near or abroad should not be divorced from a local church where those who are open to the gospel can have ongoing involvement with a healthy congregation.

Glorifying God through Equipping the Saints

This goal of the church to evangelize cannot result in watering down the message. God seeks true worshippers in spirit and in truth. The main times where the body gathers are for teaching the believers and equipping and preparing them to scatter to do the work of ministry and outreach. To weaken the diet of the church service to attract unbelievers is problematic in the long run as the church becomes malnourished.

Ephesians 4:11-16 has already been mentioned as the clearest statement of this principle in the Epistles that the special individuals God gave as gifts to the church are designed to equip the saints so that *they* (the saints) are doing the work of ministry or service. Another key text is Colossians 1:28, which gives the goal "that we may present every man complete in Christ" through the following means:

1. Proclamation - not just preaching for the sake of sermonizing, but revealing more about God and who He is; "we proclaim *Him*." God and His Word must be explained in a deep way designed to transformation not just information (Ezra 6:14, Nehemiah 8:8). Obviously this ministry is not giving the people what they want to hear but what God says they need to hear (2 Timothy 4:1-3). Expository verse-by-verse preaching should have a pre-eminent role in the church service.
2. Admonishing / Discipleship - "admonishing every man," the goal of the church is that every man would be admonished or built up through life-on-life iron-sharpening relationships. This is a responsibility "we" all share; Paul does not say this is what only one does as a preacher or pastor. It is a church effort. A key text is 2 Timothy 2:2 which shows the reproductive nature of ministry we all should strive for - the things we have heard we must faithfully invest in and impress upon others so that they will be able to pass it on as well. This goes beyond making disciples, we want to make disciple-makers who will also be used by God to become self-reproducing. The Lord calls for disciples who are disciple-makers.
3. Teaching with all wisdom - teaching with the help of God's Spirit and wisdom would encompass both small and large settings (Acts 20:20 "publicly and from house to house"), and requires diligent study (2 Timothy 2:15, Ezra 7:10).

Glorifying God in the Church

Ephesians 3:20-21 climaxes the first half of the book with the statement "*To God be the glory* in the church ... Therefore walk worthy" (4:1). Jesus promised to build the church (Matthew 16:18) and it is not a building but is His body designed to glorify Him.

Acts 2:42 gives a concise snapshot of how a God-built Spirit-filled church looks. The first defining characteristic mentioned is that they "continually devoted themselves to doctrine of the apostles" (which would later be formulated to the NT). Any church that shies away from doctrine has also shied away from the biblical pattern. It may be true that some philosophies of ministry have divorced doctrine from duty, but faithful ministry requires both.

The main verbs in the rest of this chapter are imperfect tense, which stresses a continuous pattern. This word for their commitment means remain constant, "adhere with strength ... a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action." The prefix intensifies the action of doing something persistently in the face of opposition. It means desiring something intensely, or aggressively pursuing a desired object. This word is also used to describe the strong devotion and singular desire of the 120 in the upper room as they gathered together for prayer after Christ's ascension (1:14).

The apostles' ministry of preaching and teaching is mentioned more often than any other activity in which they were engaged and was the first and foremost feature here. God's church was not built from:

- door-to-door surveys
- polls asking the Jews in Jerusalem what they wanted to hear
- marketing campaigns, gimmicks, or programs
- making the audience feel comfortable or entertained

It's also noteworthy to see that a true work of the Spirit drives people to the Word not away from it to focus on emotionalism or experiences.

Luke "stresses that in these early days, in spite of an experience as great as that of Pentecost, which might have caused them to focus on their experiences, the disciples devoted themselves first to teaching ... They might have remembered the way the Holy Spirit came and how he used them to speak so that those in Jerusalem heard them in his or her own language. They might have longed to experience something like that again. They might have been praying, 'Please, Lord, do something miraculous [like that] again.' This is not what we find. They are not revelling in their past *experiences*. Instead, we find them revelling in the *Word of God*. I suggest that this is always a mark of a Spirit-filled church" (James Boice, *Acts*, 56; emphasis mine).

Being filled with the Spirit and filled with the Word go together (compare Ephesians 5:18ff vs. Colossians 3:16ff). The Spirit-Filled Church is a Word-Filled Church.

Fellowship

Another mark of church we see in Acts 2:42 and other passages is this rich word *koinonia*, which refers to close association involving mutual involvement and relationships, sharing, joint participation, communication, communion, etc. It is not for the sake of "what I can get out of it" (what many focus on when checking out various fellowships or bible studies) but the word is often used of sacrificial giving - in fact it is translated this way in Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:13, etc. It has the idea of taking part, imparting, especially with a fellow person who lacks something you can provide. It has been pointed out that this word is never used in the NT until the Holy Spirit came - the gospels do not mention *koinonia*, this is unique to the Spirit-filled church and is used by all subsequent NT writers. Verse 44 says they were all together.

Verse 46 says that they continued to meet together both "in temple courts" (large corporate gatherings) and also "from house to house" (smaller fellowship settings).

It is in these more intimate environments that Hebrews 10:23-25 and the "one anothers" can take place. The point is not getting more people in the pews so that your numbers look better, the point is that the body dynamic is crucial and when you're not there you not only miss out on the blessing of the one anothers, but *others* miss out on you encouraging them and stimulating them on towards love and good deeds.

Conclusion

In writing this conclusion, we realize this is really more of an introduction. Such a brief paper cannot provide all of the specifics of these convictions or all of the biblical passages that relate, but we do hope this provides a concise view of our philosophy of ministry which we trust is biblical and always reforming and refining to the Scriptures.

Our prayer is that in Gold Country Baptist Church, a passion for the Supremacy of God and Sufficiency of His Word would be shared within our numbers, would spread to our community and to the nations through us, and that we might further magnify King Jesus, to the praise of the glory of God's grace. As ones who firmly believe in church leadership by a plurality of elders, it is within this context that we will work out the details of our ministry philosophy, with the checks and balances of other godly leaders and counsel, and everything always subordinate to scriptural teaching. Our commitment is regular text-driven or expository teaching, verse-by-verse, book-by-book, aiming to promote application, change, and godliness in the hearers. It is our hope that God will use us in whatever means He deems best in His purposes to bring honor to Him and to build up His people for His glory. We hope and pray we will together always seek by God's grace to work towards a biblical ministry that is Scripture-saturated, Spirit-sensitive, Christ-compelled, God-centered, and that from Him and through Him and to Him would be all things, to God be the Glory (Rom. 11:36).

APPENDIX 1: Two Models of the Church Compared¹

CATEGORY OR ISSUE	TRADITIONAL MODEL	BIBLICAL MODEL
Concept of Church	Organization	Organism
Believers	“Members” (as in a club)	Disciples of Jesus Christ (members of the Body)
Involvement	Spectators (observing action)	Participants in the action, ministers
Head	The people [or the pastor]	Jesus Christ
Authority	Constitution plus “proof texts”	The Whole Word of God
Government	Democracy (of and by the people)	[God’s flock led by a plurality of godly men called elders]
Basic Ministry	Conducting services	Equipping, meeting needs
Place of Ministry	Church building (at stated times)	Anywhere (all the time)
Primary Concern	Programs, things, buildings, etc.	God’s glory, [then] people
Objective	Build up the local church (club)	[Glorify Christ by] Building up His Body
Determining Factor	What the people WANT (peace at any price)	What the people NEED (according to the Word)
Great Commission	Get “converts” (addition)	Make TRUE disciples (multiplication)
Field	Our own area [virtually only]	The world [while not neglecting our surrounding community]
[Main] Purpose of Assembling	Entertainment, evangelism in the service	[Exalt the Lord in worship], encourage and equip His saints, stimulate to love, good deeds
Emphasis	Meetings, setting and breaking records	God, individuals, families, quality plus quantity
Pastor-Teacher	Administrator, speaker, visitor, employee (belongs exclusively to this church)	Teacher, counselor, shepherd, equipper (belongs to body, works primarily with this assembly)
Attitude toward Pastor-Teacher	The “minister” (professional)	One of “many” ministers
Board	Administrators, decision makers, occupied with facilities, etc.	Multiplicity of leadership; unified; working together to equip the saints for ministry.
Resources	Human ingenuity, available funds, etc.	Word, prayer, Holy Spirit., spiritual gifts, and ministries
Methodology	What we’re used to, feel comfortable with	Whatever the situation demands as long as it is true to God’s Word and honors the Lord
Leadership given to	Anyone willing	Faithful, available, [qualified] men
Ultimate Concern	Our church; what others think	Exalting Christ; what God says
Result	Rev. 3:1b Like the church at Sardis: you are alive, but you are dead	Eph. 4:11-16 Body built up to maturity functioning as God intends

¹ Adapted by Phil Layton from article by Hampton Keathley at www.bible.org