

Applying the Word of God to the Hearts of Men

The Mission of the Church Part 06
Selected Passages 6-15-2014

Summary: Our task (worship, one-anothers, win the lost) is not controversial. Most divisions come with method. But God has given us clear instruction on method – use the Word and not human wisdom. Only Scripture has power to transform the heart. But it does not work unless it penetrates the heart and is absorbed (applied). So all our ministry is to get the Word inside hearts, which is the only way to tap in to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. We must work hard at this (not “let go and let God”).

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Introduction

Importance of Method

We are in the midst of a brief topical study on what the Bible says about the mission of the church – what we are, what we are supposed to do, and how to do it. Up to now we haven't said much in this series that would be very controversial. I can walk into pretty much any evangelical church and say, “We should worship God, strive for holiness, and win the lost,” and I'll get nothing but amens. Most churches agree on the “What we should do” part. The controversy comes when you get to the “How.” What methods should we use? Does that even matter, as long as we get the job done? Or do the Scriptures instruct us regarding methodology? The answer is they most definitely instruct us on methodology. God gave us clear instructions on how to go about winning the lost, how He wants us to worship Him, and how we are to build up the saints.

The Priority of Deepening Delight

I will take them one at a time, starting with building up the saints. I want to start there because that is by far the most heavily emphasized of the three in Scripture. It is actually a little bit misleading to take all the various responsibilities of the church and divide them up under these three headings, because that kind of implies that they are somewhat equal in emphasis. But in the New Testament they are not. The amount of instruction we have on deepening delight in Christ (building up the saints and striving for greater holiness and righteousness within the church) is emphasized much, much more than the other two. Probably well over 90% of the material in the Epistles is devoted to this category.

As His bride it is our responsibility to become more beautiful to Him by pursuing holiness, purity, and faithful love for the Lord. As priests we are to offer sacrifices of good deeds and sanctified souls. As children in His household we are to love, fear, and obey God and love and serve our siblings. And as His body we are to grow to maturity and do His work. So how do we accomplish all that?

Only by the Spirit

The only way it can happen is through the power of the Holy Spirit. Things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – those are all called fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22. They are not humanly generated. They require divine power.

What is Our Role?

Now, if I were to just stop right here and move on to the next point – that would be a perfect example of what I mean when I talk about vague preaching. We need the Spirit's power. If we just leave it at that, there is no controversy, no one gets upset, and everyone is happy. Everyone is happy, but no one is helped, because we stopped short of finding out how this is actually done. Obviously there are some churches where it is happening and other churches where it is not, so how do we make sure we are a church where it is happening? How can we make sure that we are one of the churches filled with people whose lives are filling up with more and more of the fruit of the Spirit? What is our responsibility?

Stop Trying or Start Striving?

This is our first major fork in the road. When you ask what our role is, some teachers point in the direction of hard work, and others point in the opposite direction – just sit back and let go and let God. The “let go and let God” doctrine (or if you want the more technical name for it, it is known historically as *quietism*¹ or *Keswick theology* or *Higher Life* theology) – whichever name you prefer, that teaching says that it is wrong to put forth effort to try to obey God. People who teach that think that grace is the opposite of law. Everything they say is “Up with grace; down with law.” And they define law as anything that is commanded. So if God commands me, “Love your neighbor,” and I put forth some effort to obey, I am under law and operating in the flesh and that is bad. They say what I should do instead is just realize that nothing is required of me. Sin is essentially legalized now, and God requires nothing of me. And the more I realize that, the more I will just automatically start doing things like loving my neighbor, because it is when I stop trying that the Holy Spirit starts producing His fruit in me. This doctrine is taught by people like Bob George, Lee Lefebvre with Exchanged Life Ministries, and Tullian Tchividjian (pronounced cha-vi-jin) who wrote the book Jesus + Nothing = Everything.² They teach that God requires

¹ Quietism also involves the practice of contemplative meditation (superstitious mysticism).

² I mention Tchividjian because he is a fairly influential figure. He's a grandson of Billy Graham, and he took over as preaching pastor of D. James Kennedy's church. Recently he was asked to drop out of the Gospel Coalition because of his views on this issue. He concluded a recent blog with this statement: "...once the gospel frees you from having to do anything for Jesus, you'll want to do everything for Jesus..."

nothing of you. And the harder you try to obey God, the more of a legalist you are, and the less success you will have. But if you just stop trying, then it will all just happen.

Planting and Watering

What does the Bible say about that? The very first thing Jesus praised in His letters to the churches in Revelation 2 was the hard work of the Ephesians. In the second half of the Great Commission Jesus said we are to teach everyone to obey everything He commanded. Obedience is not something we are to avoid; it is something we need to be taught how to do. Over and over in the New Testament we are told to labor, strive, work, fight, and run like we are trying to beat everyone else. Hard work is not opposed to grace. Grace and hard work go hand in hand.

1 Corinthians 15:10 ... his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

It is true that the power comes from God alone, but God works through means. He uses human beings.

“But if we do any work, then that steals glory from God because it means we deserve some of the credit.”

That’s not true. Remember last week I told you that the church is called **God’s field** in 1 Corinthians 3, and that only God provides growth? How does that growth come about?

1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

God supplies the growth, but He only does it when human servants are faithful to do the hard work of planting and watering.

“But does that mean those who plant and those who water deserve some of the glory?”

Not at all.

7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

Sanctification happens when people are exposed to the influence of the Holy Spirit, but getting people exposed to that is hard work that we must do. And if we fail to do it, the Holy Spirit will not bypass the means that He ordained to be the way He wants to operate.

So here is an example of how methods are not just a matter of opinion or preference. Methods are implied by our identity. The fact that the church is a field teaches us that the “Stop trying” method of quietism will not work. God makes crops grow, but ask a farmer how many crops you get without any hard work. So if you are wondering how God could have been so absent minded so as to forget to put “let go and let God” in the Bible, It’s because it is a false doctrine.³

Our Tool: the Bible

Not Human Wisdom

Okay, so the church is like a field, and we are called by God to labor hard planting and watering. But what does that mean? What does it look like to plant and water seeds in the church? We will have no success unless we expose people to the influence of the Holy Spirit, but how is that done? Will any method do? Should we just use our heads and be creative and use our human wisdom to think up new ways to reach people and help them overcome sins and grow spiritually?

³ When it comes to matters that are outside of your realm of responsibility or outside of your control, then let go and let God is fine, but not in areas where God has commanded you to act.

1 Corinthians 1:17 Christ [sent me] to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

That is an amazing statement. Did you know there is something you could do that would actually empty the cross of its power? All you have to do is apply human wisdom to the effort of ministry in the church.

That is why the “how” is included in our mission statement. The “how” is huge. When a church leaves the “how” part out of the mission statement, I believe that is a massive oversight because the method you use could potentially empty the cross of its power! It is not enough to just worship, win the lost, and build up the saints – it is tremendously important what methods we use to do those things. Our methods should not just be a matter of tradition, or pragmatism, or preference. We need to do it exactly the way God tells us to do it and no other way.

Use the Word!

So what is God’s way of making people more holy? If you want to deepen someone’s delight in Christ, and bring them to greater holiness and righteousness, and help them defeat sin in their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have to expose them to the influence of the Holy Spirit. And how do you do that? Ephesians 4 is the passage that takes us from the beginning right through the whole process all the way to the final goal where the church reaches maturity and attains the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. That is the goal. That is what we are shooting for. So how do we get there? That passage says it comes at the end of a chain reaction. So let’s follow the chain backward link by link and see where it all starts. We attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ when the church becomes mature (v.13). That happens when the body is built up (v.12). And what causes that? Each part doing its work (v.16). And what causes that? The saints being equipped (v.12). And how does that happen? What is the very first steps that kicks it all off?

Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints...

The thing that brings this whole chain reaction is the pastors and teachers taking the writings of the Apostles and Prophets and teaching them to the people. Teachers put the Word of God into people’s hearts, and that starts a chain reaction that results in the church fulfilling its mission. The method for tapping in to the power of the Holy Spirit to make people grow spiritually is to put the truths from the Bible into people’s hearts. Jesus told Peter: “Feed My sheep, feed My sheep, feed My sheep” not “pet My lambs, pet My lambs, pet My lambs.” Our method is to give people the Scriptures.

That is our method because everything we need for life and godliness is contained in the Scriptures – everything.

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him ...

Our knowledge of Him comes through the Bible, and that gives us absolutely everything we need for life and godliness. We give people Scripture because they don’t need anything else. The next verse explains how we defeat sin and evil desires. It is through God’s promises in Scripture.

4 ... he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Everything we need is in the Bible.

What about Natural Revelation?

“But what about natural revelation? Didn’t God give us brains to be able to figure out the solutions to some problems through psychology? Can’t we also use that to help people grow and change?”

First of all, psychology is not in the category of natural revelation.⁴ But even if it were – natural revelation does not sanctify the soul. In Roman 1-2, people use their brains to observe some obvious truths about God, but it doesn't make them any more holy. In Psalm 19 people can observe the glory of God in the heavens, but it does not transform the soul. The first half of that psalm talks about things you can figure out about God from observing the creation, and there isn't a word in that section about transformation of the soul. But as soon as you get to the second half where he talks about Scripture, he says it revives the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes – all kinds of wonderful effects on the inner man. And if you really want some detail on that, read Psalm 119. Some time when you have all day, make a list of all the effects Scripture has on the human heart in that psalm – it is staggering. All truth may be God's truth, but not all truth is God's *Word*. And it is God's Word alone that has power to transform the human soul. Faith comes through hearing the Word (Ro.10:17). That is the means through which the Holy Spirit has chosen to work. We live by faith, and faith is believing what God says.

The sword of the Spirit is what unlocks the power of the Spirit to transform the human heart. When Jesus was battling temptation, what did He do? He quoted Scripture - as an example to us on how to fight sin. And what Scripture did He quote?

Deuteronomy 8:3 Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that come from the mouth of the LORD.

Our very life comes from the truths of God's Word. Peter says it is like mother's milk to a newborn. It is our nourishment and food and sustenance – pure, spiritual milk. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that if you have the Word of God you are **thoroughly equipped for every good work!** In John 15 Jesus said **You are clean because of the Word...**

James 1:21 humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your soul.

The way God saves us is by causing His Word to take root and grow in our hearts. That is the only way to transform the human soul.

Must be Applied to the Heart

Why Isn't it Working?

“If that's the case, then why isn't everyone way more sanctified by now? We have Bibles everywhere. I'm struggling with a sin in my life, I read 20 chapters in the Bible, and I'm still just as enslaved as ever.”

People see that and conclude that the Bible needs some help. Just Bible verses alone do not seem to do anything, so we need to help it out with some human wisdom. A little psychology so I have something more practical and helpful than just the Bible.

Do We Need Psychology?

Most Christians seem to think that way. There is a massive falling away in the church today from belief in the sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible alone isn't enough. In fact, some people teach that the Bible alone is dangerous and irresponsible. If someone has PTSD or anorexia or they are cutting or some serious problem and you just give the shallow remedy of Scripture and nothing else, you are being irresponsible. Problems like that require something greater and more powerful than God's Word – they require human wisdom – psychology – some kind of professional therapy or drugs or something. The really big problems are way beyond what God's Word can handle.”

⁴ For something to qualify as natural revelation it must be universally known, and it must be so essential that if a person rejects it, that person is lost (see Ps.19 and Ro.1-2). Psychology fits neither criterion.

What Happened to Evangelicals?

How is it that evangelicals – people whose very identity is based on our high view of Scripture as God’s Word – how is it that even evangelicals have in very large numbers bought into such a low view of the Bible when it comes to dealing with the problems of the human soul? I think there are a few reasons. First, the psychology world has done a masterful job persuading our culture that the problems of the soul are not really problems of the soul. They are just mental – or physical. And they have invented medical sounding lingo that makes it seem like dealing with a mental problem is like doing brain surgery – only trained professionals should try it and anyone else who tries it will do more harm than good. You cannot just have amateurs doing brain surgery. And they have done an incredible job tricking the general public into thinking that the professionals know how to cure these problems. They have portrayed psychology as a hard science, which it is not. It is a very, very soft science based mostly on unprovable theories. The statistics show that for many of these kinds of problems, the recovery rate for those people who seek psychological or psychiatric remedies is actually lower than the recovery rate of those people who do nothing.

Another reason I think so much of the church has embraced psychology is because so many Christians who have turned to the church for help have received advice that didn’t help at all. You come in with an anger problem and the pastor gives you 12 verses that tell you, “Don’t have an anger problem.” And you are sitting there thinking, “I already knew I shouldn’t have this problem – that’s why I’m here trying to get help!” The “take two verses and call me in the morning” approach has left so many people without any real help that they have come to the conclusion that the Bible doesn’t have any answers. A lot of preaching conveys this same thing. Preachers who do nothing but say, “You should do this and you shouldn’t be doing that…” and that is all they ever do – that kind of preaching makes people think that once you have graduated from kindergarten and learned that you are supposed to be nice and don’t hit and don’t steal things – you pretty much have the Bible mastered. They would never say that, but when week after week you never learn anything from the sermon that you didn’t already learn when you were in kindergarten, that is the message that comes across – this is a shallow, unhelpful book.

Absorbing the Word

The reason so much Christian counseling and preaching and personal Bible study fails is very simple. The truth of God’s Word does not transform the heart unless it is *absorbed* by the heart.

James 1:21 humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save your soul.

Notice that word **accept**. The Bible does not do anything to your heart until the heart actually accepts it. That same word is used in 1 Corinthians 2.

1 Corinthians 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Can an unbeliever understand what the Bible means? Yes – they are capable of reading and understanding the meanings of words and sentences. But what they cannot do is accept the truths into their hearts. It is like when you go to the doctor and he says, “You have a deficiency of this vitamin,” and you say, “But I take supplements every day,” and he says, “Yes, but because of some other problems your body isn’t absorbing the vitamin – it just goes right through your system.” The same thing happens with the truth of God’s Word. You can dump it into your ears by the truckload, but if it is not being absorbed by the heart, it has no impact. Any time you know something is true in your head, but you are not acting like it is true – that is a sign that your heart hasn’t absorbed it (or, to use the biblical term, your heart hasn’t accepted it).

You can tell your heart has fully absorbed a truth and accepted it when your belief in that thing is like your belief in gravity. You don’t have to discipline yourself to take gravity into consideration in your

decision making, right? You don't have to tie a string around your finger or write a note on your hand reminding you, "Don't just let go of things because if you do gravity will pull them down to the ground." People are not pounding their head: "When will I ever learn? Don't step off of cliffs because you always go crashing down to the ground!" People are not enrolling in 12-step groups to learn how to stop stepping off cliffs. Why? Because the truths about gravity have been absorbed by the heart so that it is just part of their whole outlook on life. They don't even have to consciously think about it. They automatically take gravity into consideration in all their decisions. That is what it is like when a truth gets absorbed. It controls how you feel, what you think, what you desire, what you decide – all of it.

So what are the implications for how to do ministry? Answer: we must not only use the Word of God as our tool, but we must strive to *apply* those truths to people's hearts. It is not enough to just say it. We need to find ways to make the things the Bible says sink in and be absorbed and accepted into people's hearts. That is why our method slogan is "*Applying* the Word of God to the hearts of men" rather than just "Giving people the Word of God." When we say "applying," this is what we are talking about. Our method of ministry at Agape, and I believe the method that God has mandated for all churches, is to find ways to get the truths of the Word of God *inside* people's hearts.

Ways of Applying the Word to Hearts

How is that done? It starts with teaching.

Teaching them to Obey

The second half of the Great Commission: "...**teaching them to obey**..." When we train teachers and preachers in the Expositor's class we really go out of our way to make sure they don't just become walking commentaries. We talk about how to study and how to interpret, but we don't leave it at that. We also talk about ways of taking the principle we are teaching and turning it like a screw into the heart. And there are lots of ways of doing that. When you come up with illustrations – don't just come up with ones that are amusing, to hold people's attention, and don't just come up with ones that help them understand; do those things, but also try to illustrate truths in ways that make the truth attractive to the person's heart so it will be more readily absorbed.

1:25 Groups

So it starts with the way we teach, but that is not all we do. Another thing we do here are the James 1:25 groups, which are designed to take the main principles from the sermon and turn the screw a few more times to get it that much deeper into the heart.

Encouragement

The most direct way we do this is through what the Bible calls *encouragement*. The Greek word is *parakaleo*, and it can be translated *encourage*, or *exhort*, or *admonish*, or *strengthen*. It has a lot of different aspects to it, but basically it is any time you use words to help a person along spiritually by applying truths from Scripture to their heart. The term that our culture uses is "counseling." So we have used that term just so people know what we are talking about, but it is a little misleading because of the way our culture thinks of counseling (with the whole therapeutic model). A better name for it might be "soul care," or "discipleship" or – the biblical word: "encouraging."

It can be simple or complex. It can be something as simple as, "Hey, don't lose heart. Remember the Lord is your Shepherd." Or it can be as complex as formal counseling sessions for 10 or 15 weeks. Any effort to get some truth from Scripture that will help the problem to absorb into the heart would qualify as *parakaleo*, or encouragement.

But whatever you call it, one thing is clear – this is what the Bible commands us to do.

Hebrews 3:13 encourage (*parakaleo*) one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

If we want to keep people from sin, this is the way to do it.

Titus 2:15 Encourage and rebuke with all authority.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

And it is not just pep-talk type encouragement. For it to work it has to be encouragement that puts the Word inside people's hearts.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

1 Timothy 6:2 Teach and encourage these things.

(The things he had been teaching all through the book.)

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the Word ... correct, rebuke and encourage

All of ministry is a matter of getting the Word into people's hearts. From the pulpit I throw the screws out there and try my best to get them started in the wood maybe a quarter of a turn. Then in the 1:25 groups we try to get them one more full turn in. But one-on-one, when you can find out the person's exact needs, and what kinds of thought patterns they have, then you can work with the person week after week and just keep cranking that screw in until it's set.

One-Another

This is what all the one-another commands are for. Encourage one another. How? "With these words." Exhort one another, rebuke one another, correct one another – how? With Scripture.

Prayer

"What about prayer? Isn't that another way to help people grow – by praying for them?"

No, I don't think prayer is another way. It is the same way. Suppose you go to your prayer group, and someone says, "My prayer request has to do with worry. I know God promises to take care of me, but I just can't help worrying all the time." So you say, "I'll pray for you," what are you going to pray? Aren't you going to ask God to enable the person to trust His promise to take care of them?

You see, when you pray for someone, all you are doing is the same process I just described but you are working from the inside instead of just the outside. On the outside you are trying to get the screw started, but then you pray and say, "God, this wood is like steel. I can't get the screw to go in. Soften up the wood, God, so this truth about how You will care for us can be absorbed."

I don't care how brilliant you are at preaching or teaching or encouraging – it is not going to be absorbed and accepted in the heart unless the Holy Spirit softens the exterior wall first. That is why the prayer groups are such a key part of everything we are doing. I won't counsel someone if they refuse to be part of a prayer group, because in order for the counsel to be absorbed, that person needs someone praying for him every day. The prayer groups are not Bible studies. It is not a teaching venue, but make no mistake - praying for one another is most definitely part of our effort to apply the Word of God to the hearts of men and women because sometimes you have to ask God to till the ground before sowing the seed is going to do any good.

Fellowship

What about fellowship? Why do we do that? Why does the youth group play games on Wednesday nights before their worship service and sermon and prayer groups? Why do we have church retreats and picnics where we play football and volleyball? Why do we have potlucks and eat meals together? Why do we love one another and serve one another and honor one another and accept one another bear one another's burdens and forgive one another and greet one another? We do all that because it is pleasing to

God, but also because the more we build our friendships, the more our hearts open up toward one another so we can receive the Word from one another.

2 Corinthians 6:11 We have opened wide our hearts to you ... 13 As a fair exchange ... open wide your hearts also.

The deeper our friendships, the more willing we are to open wide our hearts. And when someone's heart is wide open to you, you can just drop the truth of Scripture right in there. If I have played some football games with you, and sat with you at some potlucks, and we worked together on a project on work day, and we played Taboo and laughed together for three hours straight on game night – my heart just opens more and more so that when it is time for you to encourage me with Scripture, my heart can accept it, even if it is hard encouragement.

Psalm 141:5 Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.

The closer our friendship is, and the more I love and trust you, the more my heart will receive the Word from you.

Now, does that mean it is ok for us to reject the Word of God when it comes from someone we don't know or trust? No. If we do that, God will discipline us. Refusing to accept the truth of Scripture is sin no matter who is giving it to you or how they are going about it. If someone is an absolute jerk in the way he presents it, if it is God's Word you had better accept it. Don't ever think that it is ok for you to say, "I'm only going to listen if people meet all my needs and treat me really well and present it the right way."

So building friendships can help with the ministry of applying the Word to people's hearts, but it is a misuse of that principle to say it is ok to reject the truth if it isn't coming from someone you like. And it is also a misuse of that principle to hold back from giving people the Word just because you don't know them well. When people say, "Oh, I can't instruct or exhort or encourage or rebuke from Scripture just because we don't have a relationship with that person" – that is not a valid excuse. When someone needs to hear from Scripture, but it is going to be some hard words and it is going to be uncomfortable, we are not at liberty to say, "Well, I'm not friends with that person, so I won't say anything. First I need to spend years earning the right to speak into their life, then I'll say something." The Bible never endorses that idea that you have to earn the right to give people God's Word. Just the opposite. We are commanded to give people God's Word, and we are derelict in our responsibility if we don't. Build friendships the best you can so it is easier for the person to receive what they need to receive, but don't neglect your duty just because you think the relationship isn't there yet. If you see someone about to get hit by a bus you don't say, "Well, I need to get to know him a little better before I try to speak into his life about avoiding being squashed by buses."

The goal of the church is to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. How do we reach that goal? It is the end of a chain reaction that starts with teaching God's Word. And it does not just start with the ministry of the Word – that is the method all the way through. Remember when we studied Ephesians 4 and we found that we reach our goal when each part of the body functions as a "joint of supply" (which is an artery – supplying nourishment and oxygen to the other parts of the body around it)? How do you do that? Encouragement – pressing the truth of God's Word that you got from the teachers and preachers into the hearts of the people around you.

So why do we teach and preach? To apply the Word of God to the hearts of men and women. Why do we pray for one another? So the Word of God can be applied to the hearts of men and women. Why do we have fellowship? To facilitate the applying of God's Word to the hearts of men and women.

And the more God's Word is applied and absorbed and accepted by our hearts, the more we will carry out more and more of the one-anothers and the more we will fulfill the first and the second greatest commands: love God and love one another, and the second half of the Great Commission – obeying everything Christ commanded. All of that happens only when we tap into the power of the Holy Spirit by applying the Word of God to the hearts of men.

Conclusion

What are we? A body, bride, banquet, household, temple, pillar, and flock. And what are we supposed to do? As the body of Christ we build one another up to maturity by applying the Word of God to the hearts of men. As the bride of Christ we make ourselves beautiful to Christ through holiness and purity and faithful love. How? By applying the Word of God to the hearts of men. As the banquet we serve as the place where people's appetites for God can be satisfied. How? By applying the Word of God to the hearts of men. As His household we strive to do better and better at loving, trusting, and obeying God as our Father. And we strive to do better and better at loving one another as siblings, and serving one another as slaves and stewards. How do we pull all that off? By applying the Word of God to the hearts of men. As priests in the temple we offer the acceptable sacrifice of transformed, sanctified souls. How do we do that? By applying the Word of God to the hearts of men. As a flock of sheep we are to feed on what we receive from the shepherds. What is that? That is us allowing the Word of God to be applied to our own hearts.

That is how we deepen delight in God. In our slogan "Expressing, spreading, and deepening delight in Christ" – the way we go about accomplishing that last part (the deepening of our love for God) is by applying the Word of God to the hearts of men and women.

Get Good at This!

I hope it is your goal to become skilled at this, because it touches every aspect of dealing with people. How do you get your kids to stop being so lazy, or to be more respectful? It is not going to happen just by taking away privileges or confiscating their cell phone or grounding them. It will happen only when you find just the right principles from the Word of God that they need, and then find a way to actually apply it to their hearts. How do you get your wife to stop getting so angry or treating you like a child? By being harsh with her? No. Retaliating? No. Teaching her a lesson? No. Cold shoulder? No. Groveling and giving her everything she wants? No. It will happen when you find a way to get the particular truths from Scripture that she needs inside her heart.

A lot of creative people have come up with a lot of ingenious ideas on how to get people to grow and change. But if it is not an effort to apply the Word of God to the hearts of men, it will not work. You might get a little bit of short-term behavior modification, and they might trade in one idol of the heart for a less destructive idol (so instead of drugs and alcohol on the throne of the heart it might be exercise or career or family), and on the outside that will seem like a huge improvement, but in reality nothing has changed because God still is not on the throne of their heart. Only the power of God's Word can transform the heart to desire and delight in God.

Benediction: 2 Timothy 2:15 Make every effort to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Can you think of any truths or principles from Scripture that your heart seems to have a hard time absorbing? Ask the group to help you think of ways to make your heart more receptive to that truth.
- 2) How would you rate your skill level at applying the Word of God to people's hearts? Would you be willing to take steps to grow in this area (come to the Counselor's Training Meeting, read a book on the subject, listen to some lectures, etc.)?

Appendix: When is Human Reasoning Okay?

When Scripture condemns human wisdom it raises the question: What is the role of reasoning and ingenuity? When we were having a problem hearing the house speakers in the front row during the worship service, they came up with the idea of turning the speakers more inward, and that solved the problem. Is that human wisdom? No Bible verse says to try turning the speakers inward. And what about prayer groups? There is nothing in the Bible about having a one-hour session with 10 people where we go around and ask how we can pray for your walk with the Lord. And yet that is so important to us, it is one of the 12 distinctives of Agape. Why don't we solve our space problem by adding a 6:00 am service? Because no one would come. That is our reasoning, but there is no Bible verse that says to steer clear of 6:00 services. There is no end to the list of things we do based on reasoning and logic that are neither commanded nor forbidden or even mentioned in Scripture. Does God want us using human ingenuity and reasoning that way? Yes. We know that from Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul said, **On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.** But how are they supposed to get the word out about that plan? Who should announce it? And how many times? And who should hold all that money, and where should it be kept? The fact that Paul tells them to get it done but doesn't tell them any of those specifics implies that those things are up to them to decide. As long as they do not violate any biblical principle, they are free to do it however they want.

And the same thing applies not just to church policies and procedures, but also to our effort to help one another grow and change. Hebrews 10:24 commands us to **spur one another on to love and good deeds**. How is that done? If you suggest to a friend, "Since the temptation always seems to hit you late at night after your spouse has gone to bed, how about you try going to bed with your spouse every night?" – that is not in the Bible. Can ideas like that be helpful? Our ideas, reasoning, and ingenuity about things not mentioned in Scripture can be useful when each of the following is true:

- 1) It is simple enough to test
- 2) It does not violate Scripture
- 3) It is not based on unbiblical assumptions
- 4) It has the goal of applying some specific Biblical truth
- 5) It is not elevated to the level of Scripture

When (and only when) psychology sticks to those principles, it is a wonderful thing. So, for example, suppose a man isn't getting along with his wife, and he does not feel love toward her anymore. A biblical counselor might suggest that he commit to carry a chart in his pocket, and mark each time he offers her genuine praise, and to make a goal of praising her at least once a day. There is nothing in the Bible about carrying a chart or once-a-day praise. So this idea is human reasoning. But it is permissible, because it fits in the five standards.

- 1) It can easily be tested. Unlike the complex theories of psychology, it is very easy for this man to give it a try and see if it works. If it doesn't, he can move on to something else.
- 2 & 3) It does not violate any Scriptural principle, nor is it based on worldly assumptions (unlike Freudian concepts of the subconscious, or self-esteem as a virtue, or one's upbringing dictating how they behave now, etc.).
- 4) There is a principle in Scripture that teaches that love rises out of praise. And this is an effort to apply that.
- 5) It is not elevated to the level of Scripture. If the guy thinks it's a bad idea, the counselor won't accuse him of sin or look down on him as unspiritual.