

II. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective

The Ekklesia

"Christ's Church for All the Ages, Part 2"

Matthew 16:13–20

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This is the second part of a study on the seven distinctives of a Gospel healthy church. When God brings Gospel revival in the life of a believer and a church it will always bear marks. God leaves tracks. Take it from someone who as a pastor is called upon to do funerals. The only hope someone has is in Christ where they are saved by grace alone, through faith alone and in Christ alone but when someone is saved you know that grace and faith are never alone. In other words, where God's grace is at work it leaves tracks/marks. Where God brings saving faith it brings marks and that's why James says in James 2:17 that faith without works is dead. He is not saying you have to have faith plus works to be saved. No, he is telling you that saving faith works. The same thing is true when God's grace comes down from heaven and takes hold of a person in salvation or a church in revival there will be certain marks that you look for. It is those marks that we will be highlighting over the next couple of studies in our topical expositions of a particular subject.

In the last study, we started looking at Matthew 16 because it is a foundational text concerning the church and it's from Jesus. It is at a crucial point in the life and ministry of the Disciples and just days away from Jesus heading to Jerusalem to die on the cross to save us from our sins. This is a familiar text and as we look at this passage again I will just draw out a couple of things in the matter of review. In this passage Jesus is asking a conversational question to draw out His Disciples as He makes a question for transition and then to a qualifying question. And Peter will speak from his heart.

Matthew 16:13–20 says [13] *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [20] Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

To be saved you have to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior and Simon Peter confesses Him as that. Is that what we do for God to save us or is that what God allows us to do, enables us to do so that we will be saved? It is very clear that this isn't Peter bringing a comment that God is going to use but this is Peter speaking from what God has given him the ability to see and believe. This is what happens. God opens eyes and ears and it's amazing how and when He does it.

The comment I say to a lot of pastors is that there is a heady moment when someone goes through a new member's class, join the church and come up to you as the pastor and say 'Pastor, I can't tell you what it has meant to me to come to this church. I was raised in church but I don't think I ever heard the Gospel until I came to this church.' That is a heady moment for a pastor.

Boy, so you went to all those other churches and when you came to this church for the first time you heard the Gospel? I tell pastors not to get too excited when someone tells them that because while that is happening there are children who were raised in your church that are telling other pastors the same thing. Sometimes this can be true where they were in a church that didn't really preach the Gospel but most of the time it is not the case. Then one day God gives them eyes to see and ears to hear and they think 'why didn't someone tell me this before now?' The issue wasn't what was being said but the issue was now they can hear it and see it.

That is what God has allowed Simon Peter to hear. Jesus told him, 'My Father has revealed this to you.' He has taken away the shrouds of unbelief and given you the ability to hear the truth. I won't go into lengthy detail on what follows next when Jesus says 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church' but there are three options here. Peter's name means stone. One branch of the confessing church says that the stone or rock is Peter, another says it's not Peter but it's the confession that is the stone or rock and my answer is a third option which I don't believe it is Peter nor simply the confession. I believe it is Peter representing the Apostles and the Prophets.

The Bible tells us in Ephesians 2:20 that the Lord's church is *[20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone*. So here we have this picture that the church is built on a foundation and that foundation is the Word of God. The Prophets give us the Old Testament and the Apostles give us the New Testament. Peter is a spokesman for the Apostles who are speaking from the vantage point of the Prophets having given them the Word of God. Now the Apostles are giving us the New Testament Word of God and that's the foundation. When one built a house from stone in Israel there would be a little tilt to the ground that contained a large stone and then you would take stones and line them up as they rested against that large embedded stone. And then you could continue to build up with stone as they all rested upon that large one until the foundation was built. So all those large stones that make the foundation are all resting against the cornerstone and if the cornerstone is moved everything collapses.

So I believe He is telling us that the Word of God given by the Apostles and the Prophets is the foundation but it all rests on Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is the foundation of Christ's church. So when He says 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' then all that Satan will do as he strikes against it will come to naught because My church is a prevailing church. It shall not fail. It was purchased by His blood at the cross. It is established by the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit and He has designed it – 'I will build My church.'

That does not mean every local church or denomination will prevail. If they leave the foundation and the cornerstone they will collapse but His church will ultimately and finally in this world will be built upon His foundation and it will prevail. Why? When it says the gates of hell shall not prevail that tells us that Satan will try to attack the church and his weapon is the gates of hell. I don't want to overdo the metaphor and word picture here but I have to be honest to it. How many of you have been overwhelmed or prevailed upon by a gate? The very metaphor tells us Satan will attack but at most he is on defense for he has been defeated at the cross. A gate is a defensive weapon. The reason we will prevail is because Jesus on the cross went to the gates of hell, knocked them down, reached in grabbed the keys and now He has the keys and gives them through the proclamation of the Gospel to His church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So the glorious truth that Christ gives is that His church stands glorious and victorious throughout all the ages.

So what are the three things we started drawing from this text? Two of them we have covered and I'll remind you of them. Conviction number one is that Christ has designed His church for all of the ages. Jesus never tells us to pray for architects and engineers because He is the Architect and Engineer of His church. He does pray for workers who build on it like the Apostles and then the workers are like you and me and others where we ask God to build gold, silver and precious jewels upon it so Christ has designed His church for all the ages. My concern is that from time to time we look at a successful church in a particular location and particular generation and think that is the way the church is supposed to be. Then we go unthinkingly that we can unplug that church and plug it in, in our location and generation because of our fascination with contextualization.

There is no doubt that when you look at the design that Jesus has for His church that it will have to be contextualized for you have to speak the language of the location and the challenges of the location but the contextualization doesn't call you to reinvent the church. It calls you to understand Christ's model for the church and then place it in that location and generation. I'm not saying we can't learn from one another and what we are doing but we don't unplug and plug these contextualized models. We are to keep going to the Bible asking Jesus 'what is Your church' and 'how is Your church to be established?' When we get fascinated with contextualization we begin to compromise the mission and the message because we get enamored with the methods of others. We need to keep looking at the message and the mission from the Word of God and what the means God has appointed to implement it and contextualize that in our location and in our generation.

The second conviction is church health is the objective of Gospel revival ministry and not church growth. If our objective is metrics of statistics it's just a matter of time before we compromise the message and the mission in order to get the numbers. For instance we have all gone through about 30 to 40 years of worship wars and inevitably it all comes back to 'how can you argue with something that draws a crowd?' At the foot of Mount Sinai Moses had the smaller crowd. I don't think that's the metric of success. The metric of success is faithfulness to what God says is worship and are we doing Biblical evangelism that is faithful to the Word of God. So the metric of success is not our numbers but our faithfulness to the mission, the message and the means according to God's Word.

Having said that, my concern is that church growth is desirable and by in large expected when the church is healthy. The church is called the body of Christ and if you raise your children healthy then they normally grow. A healthy body normally grows so we do not want to decry the methods of statistical impact but they are never our objective. Our objective has to be faithfulness to spiritual vitality, the health of the church, while we thank God for the numerical increase. We see a lot of numbers in the book of Acts but the numbers were used for diagnostic and reporting purposes, they were never given as the objectives. It wasn't 'I'm going to preach a sermon that gets 4,000 people' but it was 'I'm going to preach Jesus' and praise God when 4,000 or even 2 come. So we preach the Gospel while thanking God for any or the expected or desired increases whether it's more Christians or more who come to faith in Him or more small groups or more missionaries etc. All of those are blessings, expected and desired, but never the objective for the objective is church health.

The third and final conviction is to implement a spiritual Gospel fitness plan that Christ has designed for the health of His church as the body of Christ. I will give you my concern and then I will walk you through the spiritual fitness plan. My concern is that church members will be treated not as customers to be served in a church, but that church members will be treated as

proprietors, owners and participants in a church. The Bible uses multiple word pictures when it talks about the church. The church is called an army, a field, a temple, a vineyard, the bride, a family and the New Testament picture you don't find in the Old Testament is the body of Christ.

At no place and no time does the Bible ever call the church a business. That doesn't mean there aren't things from the business world that don't overlap in the church life that we can learn from but I do think it's noteworthy of all the things the church is called in the Bible, like what I've just mentioned. As soon as we call the church a business the pastor then becomes CEO but the way I interpret CEO I think the pastor ought to be a CEO – chief expository officer, where the pastor is to do expositional preaching from the Word of God. Yet in most churches where the church is seen as a business, the pastor becomes CEO yet takes the background along with the shepherd and the discipler role he plays. The session then becomes the board of directors and the deacons become the consultants to the board of directors. Then the members see themselves as customers and then we wonder why they don't volunteer for the nursery or give sacrificially. The reason for this is the members have no vested interest other than I'm the customer so serve me.

How many of you have a favorite grocery store you like to shop at? We did and it was the A & P on Friday nights. How many of you have volunteered to clean the bathroom at that grocery store? What if the store said please come early Friday and clean the bathroom before you buy your groceries? I don't think you would. How many of you have rented a car? How many of you have ever washed the rental car before you took it back to the rental agency? I would say very few of you. The reason we don't do those things is because we're customers. That is what the business is supposed to do so that we keep coming back to use them. So when members of a church are treated as customers they have the mind set as 'what have you done for me lately?'

The Bible says we're joint heirs with Jesus Christ and that we're members one of another. The Bible says we are the body of Christ together. We are participants. We are proprietors by the grace of God that have been brought into an ownership relationship with the church in Christ and with Christ for His church. So we want to say 'no' to the notion of being a customer and 'yes' to being a participant and we do that by discipling them with a spiritual fitness plan that promotes Gospel spiritual health in the life of the members of the body of Christ. What would that look like?

Let's look at the Great Commission found in Matthew 28. The Lord gives this Great Commission to His church. Matthew 28:16–20 says *[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Here is this Great Commission to this seedling, embryonic church that Jesus has now planting as He is about to ascend to heaven. We know that this wasn't just for the Disciples but it began with the Apostles and we know it wasn't just for them because He said 'I will do this to the end of the age' and the Apostles aren't going to live to the end of the age. So the Great Commission is to the end of the age just like the presence of the Lord by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is with us to the end of the age.

I grew up in a Christian Missionary Alliance church and one of the key things they do is send people out on mission. It exists for the missionary enterprise. The Christian Missionary Alliance embraces the Great Commission as well or better than any denomination I know and it is fully committed with its resources to fulfilling the Great Commission that the Gospel would go to all nations. We have a National Mission's Conference and a World Mission's Conference and it really helps us here to keep missions in the forefront but in the Christian Missionary Alliance church we probably had eight missionary conferences a year. This would happen every time the pastor thought we needed one so they weren't necessarily scheduled ahead of time. And if the pastor didn't like the way the money was coming in during the faith promise time we'd have another one.

I remember on Sunday nights there would be a card table up front with an adding machine on it so the treasurer of the mission's committee would be up there adding up the money as it came in. We would be singing songs while people would bring up their faith promise and the pastor from time to time in our singing would go look at the adding machine tape and normally would say 'that is not enough, keep singing.' We were not leaving that night until it got to the place he thought it ought to be. During the 7 or 8 mission's conferences we would have almost every guest speaker we had would speak on the Great Commission. So as a kid you had no idea how many great sermons I heard on the Great Commission.

One sermon on the Great Commission that stood out to me was from a pastor from New Orleans. He read the Great Commission and then said 'The most important word in the Bible is in the Great Commission and the word is go' and then he took off with that saying 'you take go out the word Gospel and you have spel (spell), you take go out of good and you have od (odd), you take go out of God and you just have d.' I was wondering how long he was going to keep that up and honestly I can't remember how he got out of it.

Then I went off to seminary and found out that 'go' is not the most positioned word of power in that text and it's not even the command. The command is to make disciples but the making of disciples is modified by three participles. The way you would translate it straight from the Greek is 'as you are going *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*' So that becomes the Great Commission. How do you make disciples? You make disciples by going, by baptizing and by teaching.

So with that in mind the spiritual fitness plan for the church to be healthy is what I call a W.E.L.L. plan. So the W stands for worship with authenticity and that is our ministry of upreach to God. The E stands for evangelize with intentionality and that is our ministry of outreach to the world. The first L stands for loving with purpose and that is our ministry of inreach to one another. The second L stands for learning with conviction and that is our ministry of downreach to ourselves. We learn the Word of God with conviction. That is what I am proposing to you as our spiritual fitness plan.

On a side note, one thing that grates on me is when I see a bumper sticker that reads 'do random acts of love' because we don't do random acts of love for we do purposed acts of love. God so loved the world that He gave... He did something on purpose. God's people act with purpose in their love.

So you might be wondering where I came up with this spiritual fitness plan and this came from two texts of Scripture. One was from the Great Commission given and the other was from where the Great Commission was enacted for the first time in the Bible. The Great Commission

given is this passage in Matthew 28. Our mission statement here at Briarwood says for God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. This mission statement came from 4 passages of Scripture but not the least of which is this one in Matthew 28.

Equipping Christians is a spiritual fitness discipleship and I just want to say that we are somewhere between zero and 100 percent effective. I'm not saying we are perfect but just what we are committed to. Our commitment is to equip Christians to worship and reach. I would say that the Great Commission calls us to the W.E.L.L. discipleship program. We are using the Gospel. We equip Christians for the ministry of reaching (up) to God in worship, then reaching out in evangelism which equips us to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ with the Gospel intentionally. Thirdly, we reach each other as we love one another in the truth with purpose. Fourthly, we reach down to grow in, not for, the grace and knowledge of Christ. I believe that is pulled right out of the Great Commission.

Going – to make disciples you need to go and that's evangelism. Once you evangelize a person you baptize them and their household and they are enfolded into the body of Christ where we love one another. In the Bible we see when someone is saved it says 'they and their household were added to the church' which is where we love one another in Christ. Then it says 'teaching them to observe all...' so if we're supposed to teach then that means the people who are evangelized and enfolded ought to be learning and expected to learn. Pulpit preaching ought to cause people to learn or at least give them the opportunity to learn. They need to be challenged to learn. Small groups and community groups ought to be communicating what must be learned because the Christian life isn't one of intuition but it's one of Divine revelation. How shall we live in Christ and for Christ?

So where is the worship? Jesus has already disciplined these people for three years so what did they do when they saw Him? Matthew 28:17 says [17] ***And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.*** So He had already taught them the primacy of worship. I want to give you an illustration here from baseball. You can't score until you get to first base. What is getting to first base in the Christian church? It is evangelism. Then as we baptize them and enfold them into the body of Christ that gets us to second base. As we teach them and equip them then that gets us to third base – teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us. How do you know if you have scored? It is when those who have fallen short of the glory of God now evangelized, now enfolded, now equipped start exalting the Lord in all of His glory – worship. It is when they become worshippers of the Lord and that's how you know you have scored.

Now let's go to Acts 2 and see when the first time the Great Commission was put into practice. Acts 2:37–41 says [37] *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* [38] *And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. [39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."* (God continues to work through the family as He converts people individually.) [40] *And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."* [41] *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

So here they have done evangelism, enfolded with baptism into the body of Christ and they are discipling them with the Word of God. Now what happens? We see the profile, the

product of this church from the Great Commission being enacted and implemented under the leadership of the Disciples in general and Peter in particular.

Acts 2:42–47 says [42] *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

So the Great Commission implemented is worship with authenticity which is our ministry of upreach to God, evangelism with intentionality which is our ministry of outreach to the world, loving one another with purpose which is our ministry of inreach to one another and learning with conviction which is our ministry of downreach to ourselves. Now that Great Commission is being implemented W.E.L.L. – worship, evangelism, loving, & learning. They take it out to the streets and then a church is planted.

What marks out that church? All four of these marks (worship, evangelism, loving, & learning) are found in that church. We see worship in Acts 2:47 as they were praising God in the temple. We see evangelism in Acts 2:47 as well as the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Are they loving sacrificially? We see that in Acts 2:45. We see they were learning with conviction in Acts 2:42 as they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of the bread and prayers. In other words, the Disciples took the Great Commission to the streets and then took the Great Commission as the pattern as the fitness plan for the life of this congregation. In less than 25 years they will say in Europe that these people have turned the world upside down.

So I believe what I have laid out here are the three convictions and concerns that lead us into the seven marks of a Gospel, healthy church where the people own the ministry and they look to life up praise to the Lord God the Almighty. I pray God's grace and mercy would flow in us, to us and then through us as He brings revival blessings and then sends an awakening from us and many others to faithfulness in Christ. That's the fitness program.

Wouldn't you like to know what that worship with authenticity looks like – Trinitarian, sacrificial, New Covenant worship? Wouldn't we love to see people coming to Christ every single day? Wouldn't we love to love one another and excel still more? Wouldn't we want to be learning with a voracious appetite to know Christ and make Him known? Jesus said in John 17:3, [3] *And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, would You allow us to embrace the mission, the message and the means for Your church for all of the ages? Give us wisdom from above to contextualize it in our own generation and in our own location. Give wisdom to our elder and energy, passion and vision to our pastoral staff. Give insight from our deacons and give overwhelming passion for the Great Commission and the Great Commandment to go to all the world, to all of us. Thank You Father that this is not beyond us because You are with us and will be with us to the end of the age for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAY

CONVICTION #1

Christ has designed His church for all of the ages

CONCERN #1

Our fascination with contextualization

CONVICTION #2

Church health is the objective of a Gospel revival ministry; not church growth.

CONCERN #2

Remember that while church growth is not the objective it is a desired and expected blessing of church health.

CONVICTION #3

Christ has designed a spiritual fitness plan to promote Gospel health for the Church as the Body of Christ

CONCERN #3

Church members treated as customers instead of proprietors and participants.

MATTHEW 28:16–20; ACTS 2:43–48

W.E.L.L. Spiritual Fitness Plan

I. Worship with Authenticity — Our ministry to God

II. Evangelism with Intentionality — Our ministry to the World

III. Loving with Purpose — Our ministry to One Another

IV. Learning with Conviction — Our ministry to Ourselves