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FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES:

Church: Foundational Truths About and Responsibilities of

What is a church?



In a search to define what a church is, the author came to the following conclusion after studying New Testament passages which pertain specifically to the church: A church in its most basic form is a group of born-again believers who come together for the purpose of worship and fellowship. Beyond this, the author is not convinced that a group of people must meet a list of requirements which qualifies them to be a church. On the other hand, in the New Testament, churches can be seen at various stages of development -- from those with no leaders (they had to be appointed; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), to those that had established leaders and were even sending out missionaries (Acts 13:1-3). A mature church: 1) will have leaders such as a pastor-teacher and/or evangelist and elders; 2) will recognize and defer to the foundational truths about the church; 3) will be involved in fulfilling the responsibilities of the church. If these three objectives are not reached, the church is not a fully mature church.

Listed below are observations made about the church as a result of this study. They have been separated into two categories, which have been designated as: "Foundation Truths" and "Responsibilities." Foundation truths are facts about the church which define and characterize it. Responsibilities on the other hand are those things which the church is supposed to be involved in doing. These are responsibilities which have a dependency upon the actions of the local church. Therefore, please consider the importance of these truths and responsibilities in relationship to your church.

Foundation Truths:

Question: How are these truths reflected in your church on a daily basis?

1. The church was purchased by Christ (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)
2. The church's foundation is Christ because He is the reason for its existence (1 Cor. 3:11)

3. The church's Chief Cornerstone is Christ (Eph. 2:20)
4. The church's foundation was laid by the apostles and prophets who were essential components (foundational) in the formation of the church (1 Cor. 3:10; Eph. 2:20)
5. The church is a holy temple made up of believers in Christ (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22)
6. The church's head is Christ (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23,24; Col. 1:18)
7. The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12; 27; Eph. 4:16; Col. 1:24)
 - a. It is composed of Christians (Acts 11:20-21,26; 14:23; 1 Cor. 1:12)
 - b. It is diverse (Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:12,14-19)
 - c. It is interdependent (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 20-27)
 - d. It is unified (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13,20)
8. The church is subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24; 1:20-22; Mat. 11:27; 28:18)
9. The church is loved by Christ (Eph. 5:1-2; 25; Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:4)
10. The church is sanctified by Christ (Eph. 5:26; 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 2:14)
11. The church is nourished and cherished by Christ (Eph. 4:16; 5:29)

The first observation that is that first and foremost the church is all about Christ. Without Him there would be no church. Believers are secondary in comparison to Him. The church is not to exist for its own will and purpose. Though believers make up the church, without Him it would have no purpose, no direction, no power and no reason for existence. As His body, the church is to carry out His will, doing His work (Eph. 2:10) His way without grumbling or complaining (Php. 2:12-16).

A second observation is that since Christ is the Head of the church, church leaders need to be in continual communication with Him, their Chief Shepherd. This they are to do through prayer and the Word of God.

A third observation is that because Christ died for the church and therefore, loves and cherishes the church, then He only has the church's best interest in mind (Rom. 8:32). This is true because the church is His body; and as His body it is His desire to nourish and cherish it, meeting its actual, though not always its perceived needs. Therefore, the church can always depend upon its Savior (Rom. 8:32), not only to meet its needs, but also to care for it as a mother would a child (cf. Mat. 23:37), or a husband would his bride (Eph. 5:28-29).

The last observation is that the church consists of believers, all of whom are an important part of the body of Christ. Since the church is diversified, it needs to work at trying to understand, appreciate and accept the differences of others (i.e., spiritual gifting, talents, life experiences, ethnic background, nationality, etc.). This is a strength of the church. It is these various members of the body of Christ that God uses to compose the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:18,24) to make it what it is. As a result, no members have greater importance than other members of the body (1 Cor. 12:21-22), and no members are less important than the rest of the members of the body (1 Cor. 12:15-18). Being a part of the holy temple and the body of Christ, churches and individual believers are not to work together with unbelievers in the things of the Lord (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1), but only with other believers and Christian churches.

Responsibilities of:

Question: How does your church carry out these responsibilities?

1. The church is to exercise the authority which was given to it by God (Mat. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:12-13; 6:1-8; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17)
2. The church is to have a pastor-teacher and/or evangelist involved in equipping its believers for ministry (Eph. 4:11-16)
3. The church is to be directed by elders (Acts 13:1; 14:23; 20:17,28; 1 Thes. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1; 5:22,24-25; Titus 1:5; Jam. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1-4)
4. The church is to be taught (Mat. 28:19-20; John 17:17; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 4:17; Col. 1:25-28; 1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:2; Heb. 4:12)
5. The church is to be involved in worship (Psa. 2:11; 29:2; John 4:23-24; Php. 3:3)
6. The church is to be involved in fellowship (Pro. 27:17; Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25; 1 John 1:3,7)
7. The church is to be involved in service (Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 12:4-7,25; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 2:10; 4:11-12; 6:7; Php. 2:12-13; Heb. 12:28; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)
8. The church is to be involved in evangelism (Mat. 28:19; Acts 2:14,41; 4:4; 5:42; 6:7; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Col. 4:5-6; 1 Thes. 1:5-6; 2 Tim. 4:5)
9. The church is to be involved in sending out cross-cultural missionaries (evangelists) (Mat. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 13:1-5; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5)
10. The church is to care for its members (John 13:34-35; 1 Cor. 12:25-26; Gal.5:13; 6:2)
11. The church is to practice water baptism and communion (Mat. 28:19; Acts 2:38,41-42; 10:47-48; 1 Cor. 1:13; 11:20-32)
12. The church is to carry out church discipline (Mat. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:14-15; Titus 3:10-11; Heb. 12:4-11)
13. The church is to be a place of peace and order (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 11:6; 14:33,40; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:1-6; Php. 2:2; 1 Thes. 1:1; 5:13)

This category of responsibilities of the church have implications in regards to the work and health of the local church. Where the foundational truths are unchangeable truths which are not contingent upon anything or anyone, the responsibilities of the church are those tasks whose fulfillment are dependent upon the actions of the local church, though their end results are determined by God. Because these responsibilities find their fulfillment in the actions of the church, it is then true that they also find their lack of fulfillment in the inactions of the local church. Therefore if a church is not actively pursuing these responsibilities, their fulfillment simply will not occur, even though they are the will of God for the local church. As you consider them and their implications, please note again that the Scripture references listed previously will not be referenced below, though their principles are stated.

The first responsibility listed is that the church is to be involved in consistently teaching and preaching the Word of God. It is from the Word of God that people are able to grow in their faith and develop more into the image of Christ. This too was

the command of Christ after His resurrection; that once a person believed and was baptized, he was to be taught all that Christ commanded. This should not take place only in the main services of the church, but also in Bible studies and discipleship groups. These are important aspects of the church's ministry.

The second responsibility is that the church is to be involved in the worship of God. This worship is key and fundamental to any church. Without this component, it has lost its focus because God is not receiving glory from His church. The worship of God should be a natural outpouring from the individual believer as well as from the church. Worship therefore must involve the whole church where all are involved individually as well as corporately. It must be a time that is meaningful to all involved, and not something that is the same week after week, after week. Therefore thought needs to be put into the planning of services, its music, its order, etc. The goal of worship should not be to produce an emotional response. Its goal should be to prepare and help people worship their great God.

The third responsibility is that the church is to be involved in fellowship. Fellowship is a relationship that exists between believers in Christ, and between them and their Heavenly Father and Savior. This fellowship is based upon the Person of Christ and the shared, common faith of believers found in God's Word. Fellowship between believers makes them stronger in their faith as they encourage one another to remain faithful to the Lord. True fellowship is not possible between believers and unbelievers, for "what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness" or "what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). None!

The fourth responsibility is that the church is to be involved in service. Service is very important to the Christian life. A Christian who does not serve will be stunted in his growth. He will not develop as he should, and more importantly, he will not be following in the example of his Savior. He also will not be a good steward of the spiritual gift that was given to him at salvation. Therefore the church is to cultivate service in its members, teaching them to serve one another, so that individual believers will be able to carry out the works that God has appointed for them in eternity past.

The fifth responsibility is that the church is to be involved in evangelism. The gospel message is to sound forth from the local church -- that Christ died for the sins of the world, that He was buried, and that He rose again. Not only should the church be looking for opportunities to do this, but as the people of the church go about their daily activities, they should take every opportunity to make disciples, being involved in the process of bringing people to faith in Christ.

The sixth responsibility is that the church is to be involved in sending out cross-cultural missionaries, making disciples of all nations. Though this process is to begin with the city or village in which the church is located, it is to spread from there to the surrounding regions and to the ends of the earth. The church is to be concerned about other lands around the world, not just its own. It is to manifest this concern by sending out cross-cultural missionaries to other countries, to see converts made, and new churches started, even though its own nation has not yet been fully reached. Jesus commanded this in Matthew 28:19 and in Acts 1:8. The

book of Acts is the record of the beginning of this process, which the church today is to continue.

The seventh responsibility is that the church is to be involved in the care of its members. The church is to serve and care for one another. When one member of the body suffers, the whole body is to suffer. When one member rejoices, the entire body is to rejoice. This is how all men will know who Christ's disciples are, by their love for one another. A body which does not care for itself is an unhealthy body.

The eighth responsibility is that the church is to be involved in the practice of water baptism and communion. Once a person believes and becomes a disciple of Christ, he is to be baptized in accordance with Christ's command. Also, believers are to partake of the Lord's Supper as a memorial and remembrance of Christ's death for them.

The ninth responsibility is that the church is to be involved in the practice of church discipline. God disciplines those whom He loves, and He expects the church to do the same. When a confessing believer falls into sin, he is to be approached and exhorted to turn from his sin. If he does not repent, then the process continues until he either repents or is put out of the church. The goal of this process is multifaceted: it is to be done not only for the restoration of the erring believer, but also for the glory of God, the protection, purification, unity, and testimony of the local church, as well as for the necessity of the church to be obedient to the command of Scripture.

The tenth responsibility is that a church should have a pastor-teacher and/or evangelist involved in equipping its believers for ministry. This is an important aspect of a church's ministry because the main function of a pastor-teacher and evangelist is the equipping of the saints which results in the building up of the body of Christ. Without such men, the church cannot be built up to maturity. (See the article titled, "Pastor's and Evangelist's Equipping Ministry").

The eleventh responsibility is that the church is directed by elders. Elders, according to the Scriptures, are to be men, not women, who are to desire their position and who are spiritually qualified. As elders, they are in a position of responsibility of care-giving, of protection, of setting an example, and of leading the sheep, working alongside the pastor-teacher. Therefore not just any individual is to be placed in this position too quickly, but he is to be tested first and found faithful. (See the article titled, "Church Leadership Roles Defined")

The twelfth responsibility is that the church has authority that has been given to it by God. It has the authority to carry out church discipline, judge matters between believers, and its leaders have charge over the members of the church, etc. Therefore the church needs to carry out and not neglect its responsibilities or take them lightly. On the other hand, it too must make sure that it is not abusing its authority and power; lording it over those within its care, and/or teaching an unhealthy view of authority in the church. One must remember that this authority was given by God, and the church elders are the stewards of it. If they abuse their stewardship, they will one day be called to give an account. However if they are good stewards, then one day the Chief Shepherd will reward them.

The thirteenth responsibility is that the church is to be involved in maintaining peace and order. The church is to be a place that is different from the world. Such things as chaos, division, strife, jealousy, anger, factions, or any other deeds of the flesh are not to be manifested in the church. The church is a place where the fruit of the Spirit is to be evident. If this is not the case, then how can the church ever be salt and light in a dark and dying world when it is no different from the world that it is suppose to impact with the gospel? It cannot!

The church's motivation:

As one considers these observations about the church, one needs to be concerned about the fact that a church is able to do many of the right things, though at times not for the right reasons. This is why the intent (the motive for why something is done) of a person or of a church is so important. Why does one do what he does? This is what Christ will one day judge. This is the reason why it is so important that church leaders consider the inalterable and contingent realities which were briefly discussed above. A church does not want to find itself in a situation like the church of Ephesus did which was doing many of the right things, but for the wrong reasons (Rev. 2:1-7). The exhortation given to that church by Jesus was that if it did not once again do what it was doing for the right reason, then He would discontinue using it as a light in Ephesus. This is the reason churches need to consider why they do what they do. They need to make sure that they continue to abide in Christ, otherwise they can do nothing of any significance (John 15:3-5). They will become a useless, dried-up vine which is good only for the fire (John 15:6). Though this should never be the condition of any church, too many times it is, and nothing is done to change it.

The church's purpose statement:

Church leaders need to develop a short phrase or one sentence purpose statement for the church's members to memorize. Its objective is to help the people of the church remember why their church exists and it should be written as specific as possible. The church members will then know the purpose of their church, and their purpose in relationship to their church. This statement will also guide church leaders in decision making and planning as they take into account why their church exists.

The church's core values:

It is good for a church to develop a statement of its core values to help it stay on course and do those things it should be doing. This statement should contain those things which the church knows are important to its existence; such as loving the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and mind, and loving their neighbor as themselves (Mat. 22:37-39). It should not be a long document, but one that reminds the church's leaders and members of those key values which are important to them.

This document should be reviewed on a regular basis by both groups to help them remember why they exist and what their tasks are.

The church's policy manual:

Another thing which can help a church keep on track is a policy manual. A policy manual is a document that states the church's understanding, general approach to, procedures, and direction of its core values, as well as other important issues. This should be a lengthy document. Since the thirteen contingent realities discussed previously are things the church should be doing, it is important to write policies for each of these issues, as well as anything else which is important to the church (e.g., duties of deacons and deaconesses, etc.). Then when questions arise on issues which the policy manual addresses, the church's position can be referenced and decisions made based upon this document.

When writing a policy manual, there are two things to remember: 1) all policies are to be based upon the Word of God; and 2) what is written is not unchangeable and can be modified in the future if necessary. A policy manual can change because it is not the Word of God, though it will contain references to the Word of God. If a policy manual is well written and biblically-based, it should not be changed on a regular basis. It should however be reviewed every few years to see whether any policies need to be updated. Take the time to write such a manual if you have not done so already as policies give a church guidance, protection and help in times of crises.

The church's constitution:

Lastly, a church constitution is a valuable document. This is because it is generally required by most governments and because it helps guide a church and keep it moving in the direction it determined when it was founded.

A church constitution is a document that contains not only the legal information about the church which may be required by a government, but other things such as (though not limited to):

- Church's name
- Church's address
- Church's affiliation (denomination, association, etc.)
- Statement of faith (doctrinal statement)
- Purpose statement
- Core values
- How the church is governed
- How leaders are chosen in the church
- How new members are accepted into the church
- Guidelines for church meetings and how often they will take place
- How church disputes will be settled

- How church discipline is to be carried out
- Procedure to hire or dismiss a pastor
- Procedure to change the constitution
- How to dissolve the church properties

This document is generally a legal document which governs the church as well as protects it from opposing parties which may desire to harm the church, or even take control of its property and facilities. Therefore after this document is written, it should be viewed by a lawyer to make sure that it meets the necessary legal requirements of the civil government and its legal system. It, as well as the church's policy manual, should be referenced when questions arise which these documents address. Not doing so can cause ethical as well as legal problems for the church and its leaders.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



1. How do you as a church leader see the foundation truths listed below as important to the everyday ministry of your church? How do they or why should they make a difference to you and your church?

- The church was purchased by Christ
- The church's foundation is Christ
- The church's Chief Cornerstone is Christ
- The church's foundation was laid by the apostles and prophets
- The church is a holy temple made up of believers in Christ
- The church's head is Christ
- The church is the body of Christ
 - It is composed of Christians
 - It is diverse
 - It is interdependent
 - It is unified
- The church is subject to Christ
- The church is loved by Christ
- The church is sanctified by Christ
- The church is nourished and cherished by Christ

Please explain:

2. How do you see the inalterable realities listed above specifically manifested in your church? List general observations.

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3 When considering the contingent realities listed below, are there any which your church is not doing; or if it is, it is not doing a good job in fulfilling? Please circle those points which need improvement in your church.

- The church is to exercise the authority given to it by God
- The church is to have a pastor-teacher and/or evangelist involved in equipping its believers for ministry
- The church is to be directed by elders
- The church is to be taught
- The church is to be involved in worship
- The church is to be involved in fellowship
- The church is to be involved in service
- The church is to be involved in evangelism
- The church is to be involved in sending out missionaries
- The church is to care for its members
- The church is to practice water baptism and communion
- The church is to carry out church discipline
- The church is to be a place of peace and order

4 Please list ideas which you think your church can implement to improve in the areas which you circled above.

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NOTE: Please view the individual sections of this manual for further discussion about the items which you listed above. In each of these sections you will see more application questions.

5 If your church does not have a core value statement, please list below those core values which you believe are already central to the operation of your church. Please list with each one the Scripture references from which it was derived.

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6 When you look at this list of core values, do you see any that should not be there? Do you see some that are missing? Sometimes churches have core values which are not biblical, and are even destructive (e.g., excessive authority, women in leadership, etc.). Do you see any of these in your church?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. Have you written a church constitution? Have you looked at examples of other constitutions which are in use by other churches in the area where you will begin your new church?

2. Have you developed a list of core values which you believe are important to the success of your new church? If not, please begin to do so below. List with each one the Scripture references from which it was derived.

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3 From your core values, develop a purpose statement. Try to make it easy to remember.

4 Have you written a policy manual for your new church? The issues below are topics which you should include. Do you see the advantage of your church having such a manual?

- The church is to exercise the authority which was given to it by God
- The church is to have a pastor-teacher and/or evangelist involved in equipping its believers for ministry
- The church is to be directed by elders
- The church is to be taught
- The church is to be involved in worship
- The church is to be involved in fellowship
- The church is to be involved in service
- The church is to be involved in evangelism
- The church is to be involved in sending out missionaries
- The church is to care for its members
- The church is to practice water baptism and communion
- The church is to carry out church discipline
- The church is to be a place of peace and order

5 As you write your policy manual, who should you incorporate in the process of helping and advising you? What resources can you use for guidance?

People:

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Resources:

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