
Family Talk on Ministry Concerns

Philippians 2:1-5; 19-21

Introduction

Each February or March, we have set aside some time to have family talks as a church. We have discussed together in a more casual way issues of truth, ministry and life. Usually these have been on Sunday Evenings in our closer walk service.

RAISING CONCERNS

Some of you have raised concerns about the Chapel. These have largely pointed to a concern that our teaching and preaching is too academic. It is sometimes too difficult, too “high theology”, too hard to understand. This seems to have discouraged many. It also seems to have kept you from bringing unbelievers to church.

One thing I want to say straightaway is that there will be many of you who are not frustrated and many who actually embrace it and want more. I hope that you will be encouraged this morning to continue to pray and participate as we as elders continue to learn and grow.

REFLECTION BY THE LEADERSHIP

The concerns have prompted close to three hours over two meetings of humble, helpful self-examination and reflection. Brothers and sisters, we are men who are deeply aware of the awesome responsibility and accountability we have. We so want to both glorify God and do good for His people.

RESPONSE THROUGH THESE TALKS

The Elders asked me to have this talk with you this morning. We wanted to reach out to as many as possible. It is our desire to model what we call for. That is, we want to be approachable, humble, caring more for the interests of others, flexible in liberty while holding fast to the essentials in truth.

This evening, we will be having a family talk about how to please God in the midst of conflict. I pray that you will be here as we listen together to Paul’s instruction to the church at Philippi. The next two Sunday evenings will be Family Talks on Shepherding and on Prayer.

Some Problems that have been described

Our teaching and preaching is too academic and hard to understand.

Our philosophy of ministry does not provide preaching for the lost.

We have a “we are the only ones who are right” attitude that at least looks like pride and may be sinful.

Some Principles we must maintain to be pleasing to God

I want to bring some Biblical principles to bear on us so that we will all be pleasing to God.

The Measure of a Biblical Ministry

Hebrews 13:17

We as Elders must give an account to God. He has the standard He has placed in the Word. We must measure ourselves by that and be clear in our consciences.

The Method of a Biblical Ministry

2 Timothy 4:1-8

The Bible is emphatic on the place that teaching, preaching and instruction have in the church. This is because people must repent in what they believe and want. So, we are to lead through careful, Biblical teaching.

The Model of a Biblical Ministry

Acts 20:24-35

Look with me at Paul's model of ministry:

- Testifying of the gospel of the grace of God (v.24)
- Preaching the kingdom of God (v.25)
- Declaring the whole counsel of God (v.27)
- Paying careful attention to ourselves (v.28)
- Paying careful attention to the sheep (v.28)
- Being alert to wolves coming in among the elders and flock (v.29)
- Unceasing labor in prayer, instruction, counsel with tears (v.31)
- Dependence on the enabling grace of God with a hope set beyond the death line (v.32)
- Ministry not for personal gain but rather with personal sacrifice (v.33-34)
- Embodying what Jesus said and what we teach (v.34-35)

The Manner of a Biblical Ministry 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Let's look together at how Paul conducted his ministry:

- Courage in conflict (v.2)
- Honesty and truthfulness in preaching (v.3)
- Aiming to please God, not people (v.4)
- Integrity in finances and relationships (v.5-6)
- Care and tenderness with people (v.7-8)
- Hard work so as not be a financial burden (v.9)
- Holy conduct in every area (v.10)
- Fatherly exhortation with practical application for their walk (v.11-12)
- A reception of the Word of God (because of the above) (v.13)

- Patterning ourselves after people who are doing well (v.14)
- Keeping on even in suffering (v.15-16)

Some Perils that we are all vulnerable to

I see several dangers in this whole sphere of ministry and concern. Please do not take these as *accusations*, but rather as dangers we want to alert to.

Pride with Resulting Defensiveness and Entrenchment

Pride will cause us to respond with a sense of being right, of being beyond correction or change, of defending what we are doing without more careful thought and reflection. Therefore we need to repent, humble ourselves and receive the grace of God.

Fear of Man with Resulting Loss of Confidence and Courage

Fear of man may cause us to be overly concerned about what people think, or that people will leave. In other words, we become men-pleasers and our ministry convictions, our confidence in the Word and our courage to preach and teach are undermined. Therefore, we need to repent, trust in God and His means and have courage to speak boldly and with right words.

Selfishness with Resulting Demands for Felt-Needs and Simplicity

Being dominated by self-interest may cause people to demand that everything be suitable for them. What emerges is discontent, complaining, division and corrosive speech. Therefore, some need to repent, look to others interests before themselves and raise concerns in the way God has directed so that all may profit.

Worldliness with Resulting Confidence in our Culture's Values and Methods

Being poured into the world's mold can cause us to value and adopt the world's methods of ministry and communication. Reacting to the world's mold can cause us to not recognize the responsibility to communicate clearly and minister effectively. The third way is TO HOLD THE LINE while BEING ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE. We must get it right and get it across. Here is a question for us: if the Chapel were in Nairobi, what would we change and what would we not – assuming 50% illiteracy? In other words, why would we adjust our ministry to be effective there and not here?

Some Pressures we must resist in order to maintain third way

Pressures come in order to push us down slope from the third way: either to go one way pushed there by the pressure or the opposite as a reaction against the pressure. Here simply are some “both-and’s” that are the high road of Biblical ministry.

Love for God and Love for People

The constant challenge is to maintain real love for God and people. The more we tend to intellectualize our relationship with God, the less we will tend to connect to people. Paul wonderfully maintained both, even with difficult people.

Biblical Content and Clear Communication

We must both *get it right* and *get it across*. We must understand it ourselves. And we must try to teach it in a way that people can generally understand what we are saying. The more complex the subject or text, the more difficult it is to get it across. It is interesting that Peter wrote that Paul was at times hard to understand and some got him wrong and destroyed themselves. So there are times when what we say is hard and people must accept that. But, it must never be that everything we say is hard.

Spiritual Blindness and Spiritual Illumination

Some will either dismiss people as being willfully spiritually blind or that the Spirit will give illumination regardless of our communication. Some people will be blind and the Spirit does illuminate, but these are explanations of what is happening, not excuses for poor communication. I trust that God will open eyes through the grace of preaching and teaching and I believe that grace flows best through clear pipes.

Human Technique and Spiritual Enablement

Our Christian culture is largely down-slope on these two ideas. Either we communicate to the masses in the masses’ way or we preach like retro-grade puritans. Either way, we lose the third way of spiritual power through clear preaching and teaching.

Biblical Truth and Biblical Application

The challenge here is that some want to be given *what they can do*. The challenge for is that we want to give people *what they should know*. The third way says that all truth lives and does. Everything we believe (or doubt/disbelieve) does shape actions. The Bible consistently connects this *bit of truth* with that *bit of life* (Powlison).

Worship for Saints and Services for Sinners

I mention this because it is being raised as a problem, “I would never bring an unbeliever to a service (morning worship) at the Chapel.” The public ministry of the Word has a “come and understand” for saints and a “come and see” for sinners. The very same preaching may smell good to saints and stink to unbelievers (2 Corinthians 2:15). The unbeliever comes in, hears Biblical prophesying, his

heart is exposed and he bows to God (1 Corinthians 14:23-25). This is to say that if we are communicating clearly, then both the believer and the unbeliever are responding to *what was said* not *how it was said*. Both must either receive or reject because it was generally clear. In preaching, there is the mixing of the sovereign work of the Spirit, the clearness of the message preached or taught and the responsibility of the person to have a hearing and heeding heart.

Some Practices that may help us do better

Here are some suggestions that I would like to make to help us in all this:

Personal - Brokenness, Humility and Prayer

Brothers and sisters, we need more of this, personally and corporately.

Preaching – Simplicity and Clarity

Here are some ways that we will work harder at *getting it across*.

- Watch for long sentences with lots of subordinate clauses.
- Summarize and capture rather than quote when possible.
- Explain vocabulary when possible.
- Don't make the text more complicated than it already is.
- Try to connect truth to doing in concrete ways.
- Serve the same meal to everyone – but use a food mill for babes, cut the steak for children and give the meat and potatoes to the mature.

Interacting – Care and Courage

Lastly, we want to help you grow in both love and knowledge, in obedience and ministry. So we commit ourselves to the following.

- To help you know that we want you to understand.
- To help you come quickly with your concerns rather than later so as to avoid complaining, criticizing and division. We must then be humble and approachable to you.
- To help you see our progress not our arrival. This means we have to be progressing and not thinking or implying arrival!
- To help you see the design of our ministry and to connect to each part so that you can grow.
- To help you to be patient and prayerful as we work hard to please God and do good for you.
- To help you to see your own need for progress and not be frustrated with where you are spiritually.
- To help you to pay attention to other's interests more than your own. Listen attentively for the bit of Scripture and bit of truth that does connect to you life and rejoice in the bits that are connecting to others.

Conclusion

I want in conclusion to call for these as a people together:

Concerted prayer for each other

- Taking our concerns to God in prayer first, seeking his grace and wisdom.
- Bathing all that we do in prayer as Paul always did over his concerns with churches.

Biblical responses when concerned

- Go early and quickly to leadership when you have concerns.
- Be very careful about discussion with people that ends up being divisive.

Seeing mutual progress, not arrival

- Helping one another to grow through ministry.
- Helping the elders to do well with both encouragement and exhortation.
- Giving time for the Spirit, the Word and God's grace to bring about change.