

Title: Doing Church in the Information Age

Text: Acts 20.20

Theme: The public and private ministry of the Word

Series/Occasion: May 29, 2005 PM

Prop Stmt. Knowing the Word is important but no substitute for doing the Word

Tonight is my attempt to let you know what our study in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians along with assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the church has done to provoke some thinking by myself and other leaders. The introduction may seem a bit random, but I think I can tie it together in an intentionally loose bow, since these ideas are still germinating. Leadership can be frustrating because you think about an idea for a long, long time, discuss it, shape it, re-work it, and then go to do it and this idea which has been taking form in your mind for a long time, you forget is an entirely new concept to others. Since you are comfortable with the idea, you assume that everyone else will see it exactly as you do, and when they don't, you think – what is wrong with these people? On the other hand, if you are not in leadership, and you hear about something for the first time, and a change is going to take place rather quickly, you may get frustrated because you were not informed, consulted, or given any warning. How do you fix that? The best way is for leaders to let the rest know as much as they can along the process, because even though the leaders have to lead, they do not necessarily know everything. So, with Jerry being gone, tonight gives me an opportunity to explain some things that I have been working through personally, and with some of the leaders.

Read Text

How many magazines do you receive at your home or work?

How many newspapers do you regularly read?

How many TV stations do you have choice in watching?

How many radio programs/stations do you have a choice in listening to?

How many Web sites can you hit to gain information?

How many bookstores are within driving distance and how many books do you own?

How many CD's, DVD's, tapes can you buy, borrow and listen to?

How many newsletters do you receive or can you receive in the mail?

We are gagging on information. We have so much information, and we place a premium on having all of that information. We give degrees to people who are able to memorize information and reproduce that on tests and through papers. Within the church, we teach in our ABF's, we teach on Sunday mornings, we teach on Sunday nights, we teach on Wednesday nights, we teach in the Men's meetings, Women's meetings, retreats and special conferences and seminars. But, as a pastor, I look at my training and ask, "Well, what do you expect?" I went to a Bible college and sat in classes, where my relationship with my professors was usually limited to the time that I sat and listened to them lecture in class. I went to seminary, where at that time there was a policy that professors were not permitted to fraternize with the students since that could affect the professors ability to be objective with their grading. I learned the Bible through classes, as did much of the staff, so naturally when we think of teaching the Bible and helping you understand it, we

think of classrooms, lectures and notes. The measure of a sermon tends to be, did you learn something interesting, did it keep your attention, did it explain the text, did it motivate you to want to know more? But what about the doing of the Word? Is my job just to explain the Word and leave it up to the Spirit to do all of the applying?

Jesus said, the man who hears the Word but does not do it, is building his house on sand. James said, the man who hears the Word but does not do it, is like the fool who did not take advantage of what the mirror revealed to him. Throughout the Scriptures, we see that God places a premium on what He calls Wisdom, which is the application of biblical knowledge. The book of Proverbs and James along with all of the epistles illustrate this very point. The doctrinal books of the Bible were always written for specific occasions to change or correct behavior. 2 Timothy 3.16-17 makes it clear that the Scriptures were given so that the man of God would be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

When we think of learning, we tend to think of a classroom. When you look at how Christ taught, you see that He spent very little time in a traditional classroom setting, although it certainly appeared that on the Sabbath He was in the Synagogues and was teaching. But for the most part, look at how Christ taught. He taught as He lived and He spent a great deal of time living with His disciples. Now, I grant you, that the apostles are part of the foundational elements of the church (Ephesians 2.20), but Christ presented a Christianity that was very daily. Christ not only taught and ministered to large groups, he selected a small group to whom He really poured Himself into and even of the twelve he selected three that He was even tighter with. The entire upper room discourse that we studied was given at a meal, and perhaps a portion of it walking to the garden. Taken together, Christ had both a public ministry and a private ministry.

When we move into the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which captures the story of how the gospel moved from Jerusalem to Rome, we see that this same pattern continues. In Acts 2.46 we see the public and the private ministry of the church. There were public meetings and there was private ministry. In Acts 20.20 Paul reminds the elders at Ephesus about his ministry with them and says, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house."

Dear flock, this is one of the areas where I think we are weak. I think for the most part that our theology is clear, our preaching and teaching is substantive and compelling, we seek to teach children, not entertain them, we seek to train our students to be soldiers for Jesus Christ, which is why our student ministry is not a spiritual babysitting service. And, I think that when problems arise, we have a good response team that functions rather well in private ministry. There is a lot of personal discipleship that is taking place. But while this does not happen all of the time, the church model that is presented is, get saved, go to church, do stuff in the church and if something happens in your life and you stop going to church or doing stuff in the church, then you need to get over it or get through it so that you start going to church again and start doing stuff in the church. But the Christianity that is set on display in the NT is more than going to meetings, and doing stuff. It is a Christianity that lives and breathes in the context of relationships that reveals

on a daily basis what we really believe because we see whether or not we are really living it out.

Listen to these words:

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Live in harmony with one another. Be willing to associate with people of low position. Live in peace with each other. Warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes or daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. If a man will not work, he shall not eat.

These commands demand relationships that go beyond a meeting here and there followed up by a fellowship in a restaurant or potluck. If we are going to share with God’s people who are in need, we have to know what the needs are. If we are going to provide for legitimate needs, we have to have relationships with people that help us see what is really happening.

Now, when a problem arises in a person’s life, in the church; what do we tend to do? Send them to Jerry – right? Jerry is the counselor. No one talks about it (which can be good), we can all pretend that everything is fine. And frankly, when a person’s life gets off track, if that person wants help, we can and do provide some substantive, biblical counseling that has helped many, many people. But, in order to provide people with the private ministry of the Word, it’s as if we wait for the wheels to fall off then we help people. If I go back and look at my own schedule, my time is basically divided up into three areas. 1) Preparing for messages or classes 2) Meeting with the elders and staff working on ministry stuff and 3) Meeting with individual people who are facing some challenging situations (hospitals, funerals, counseling, etc.) I am really not mentoring young men like I should, but then again I ask myself – when would I have the time to do that?

Now, with all of that as background, I want you to know what I have been thinking about and discussing with some of the staff and with the elders. In some cases, it has taken on more than just talk, we have started to put some plans together and have changed a few things.

Elders (shepherds who smell like sheep). Notice 1 Timothy 5.17, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” 1 Peter 5.2 “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” While we hold all of the elders responsible to protect and promote the doctrine of the church, we have organized them

into two groups. One group focuses upon administering the church; that is directing the affairs of the church. The other group focuses on shepherding, or the private ministry of the Word in providing oversight of the spiritual development of people. Explain what the shepherding elders do and what the administration elders do, how meetings function, etc.

Ideally, I would eventually like to see the group of elders devoted to shepherding grow to about 50-60 men, who not only meet the qualifications of an elder, but who each have a flock that is part of the church for whom they are responsible to oversee the spiritual development of each one. I make it very clear to every person who is in the membership class that are committed to you going around the bases. We are committed to helping you grow as a follower of Christ and helping you find your place of ministry, by equipping you and leading you into a place of ministry. So, if you only want to sit and not grow and not serve, then don't join Cornerstone. Because otherwise I and others will drive you batty. But, how do we on a personal level oversee that? How do I know if a member of the flock stops coming? I do not want my only source of information to be a computer list. If we are a body, and if a part of the body falls off, shouldn't you miss it? If a part of the body falls of, either that part was not really part of the body, or we are not functioning as a body.

Let me throw one more piece of information your way. When you walk into this Worship Center on a Sunday morning, it really appears that we have a large church, much larger than when we were meeting in the auditorium. The truth is, we are not larger. In the past year, we have stopped growing. But for many the perception is, we are a large church, and the truth is, we are not really all that big. I think that it is important that we all meet together if at all possible, and this facility enables us to do that and have a wonderful setting for our public ministry, but I think that we have to be even more intentional on our private ministry. I am not proposing any specific changes at this point, it is too early for that, because the leadership has not talked about it at that level yet. We have talked about the need to minister more effectively to our people on a personal level and to be with them, more in settings where life is happening, and less in classrooms where life is generally not lived. I do not know what that will look like – yet. But I want you to know that we take our mandate seriously. Cornerstone Baptist Church exists to glorify God by leading believers toward maturity through Worship, Instruction, Fellowship and Evangelism. We will do everything that we can and should to help carry that out. And in the future, as our ideas take shape, we will communicate them to you. I just wanted you to know what we are thinking, so that you can function as part of the church.