

WANTED:

**A CHRISTIAN LEADER WHO IS REAL, VULNERABLE,
LOVING, GRACIOUS, KIND, HONEST, AND GODLY**

(Christian Leaders: It's Time to Stop Playing Games)

By PAUL HEIER

Your Younger Brother in the Ministry

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Dedication

Dedicated to the pastors and Christian leaders who are in the trenches working for the kingdom while receiving very little earthly reward.
God will reward you one day.

Thank You

A special thank you to John Fuoss for his friendship, example, and ministry.

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Personal Disclaimer: I'm an imperfect Christian calling upon imperfect Christian leaders to be real with God, the Christian community, and the world. I don't have it all-together and either do they. It's time to let God be God. We need to be the servants we were intended to be instead of trying to procure fame, fortune, and fantasy. I'm sick and tired of Christian leaders propping themselves up in their own human greatness. It's time to lift up the name of Christ and to admit our own human weakness before a watching world. I'm not mad about any leader's particular sin, I'm mad that they act like they don't have any.

Part 1:
Sharp Words to Christian Leaders

Chapter One

Looking for Honesty Not Perfection

God looks at the heart, but man can't keep his eyes off of prestige, power, and money. Younger evangelicals like me have been looking for solid Christian leaders to follow for years. It seems like much of what we find is an honest face connected to a seriously deformed heart. Many of the pastors and modern "prophets" of Christianity are more interested in forming their own personal kingdoms than they are in working for God's kingdom.

Jesus was rejected on this earth because He came representing a spiritual kingdom—He didn't lead with all the glitz, glamour, and fame that is now necessary in the powerhouse evangelical circles. He didn't have a church of ten or twenty thousand people. As a matter, of fact, He barely had a church at all.

He was poor. He wasn't driving the latest model car or, in a desperate act of humility, driving last year's latest model. He was the real deal. Jesus led with power, but He was humble. Jesus was concerned about building the Father's kingdom.

"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

--Jesus praying to his Father in Matthew 6:10

Why is it that modern evangelical leaders start off so well, but end so poorly? Why can't they be honest? Why can't they tell the truth? Why should we believe they're worthy to lead if they don't even think we're worthy to see who they really are?

My generation and the younger generations are amazingly tolerant. We realize our leaders aren't perfect and that some of them have serious issues. We've learned that people have real problems and real temptations. We happen to believe that reality and honesty are important. The older days of the importance of "image" haven't worked out. Wearing a beautiful suit to your funeral doesn't make you any less dead!

Younger Christians aren't afraid to be real with God because they interpret God differently than many of the older Christians. We believe that God reached down to save sinners and that his reaction to them is one of forgiveness, love, grace, and care. Many of the old-line leaders say they believe that, but somehow think they've escaped the all-seeing eye of God. They won't need his forgiveness, love, grace, and care because God will never see the "hidden" them. They espouse a personal mysticism that is hard for us to grasp.

Perhaps it's their maturity that leads them to think they can escape God. Perhaps it's their brilliance or, more than likely, they're resources. They don't need God. They have untold amounts of money, power, publishing houses, churches, denominational newspapers, and a whole host of friends who are hoping to be just as famous and influential as they are. But, where is God in this equation?

Chapter Two

Power, Politics, and Money

The younger evangelicals like me believe that God really is sufficient to meet our needs. Power, politics, and meaningless rhetoric have gone the way of the dinosaur. Jesus isn't any more interested in man's power plays or political maneuvering than He is in whether you have cheddar or Swiss on your burger. God is interested in people. God is interested in his agenda and in his kingdom. He's too big to be made small by your own personal plans for greatness.

He's interested in you, but He's not interested in helping you start a personal kingdom that will undermine his own kingdom. That would be sheer folly and foolishness for a God who is all-knowing and all-consuming.

When God said that we should have "no other gods before" him, He wasn't kidding. As a matter of fact, the penalty for such action was (is) pretty strict. God wiped out many people in the history of the Old Testament because they stopped worshipping him to worship false gods and do their own thing.

"For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. "But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.' "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward." Since the day that your fathers came out

of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. "Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did more evil than their fathers." You shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you. "You shall say to them, 'This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.

--Jeremiah 7:22-28

God is not a big fan of us doing our own thing. He wants us to worship him and him alone. So many of the modern evangelical leaders have forgotten that. They use God to get your attention, bring you into church, and extract the precious dollars from your wallet. God is a tool much like the little pick a dentist uses to check soft spots on your teeth. God doesn't like to be used any more than you or I do. God isn't a hook for reaching people—He is the almighty answer for man.

He is the missing solution to our lives. He isn't just "10 Points to Prosperity" or "How to Forgive Your Neighbor"—He is the God who has reached down and loved you and me. And, He deserves to be loved back with a complete and total love. He is the very essence of church and the Christian life. The modern leaders that are using him as an emotional or spiritual hook instead of letting him occupy his rightful place as God are committing the same error that was committed centuries before. There is a huge penalty for abusing God.

And, there seems to be an even greater penalty for abusing the people of God.

Where are the true, Christian leaders? When will dreams of power, prestige, politics, and power be smashed down? When will Christians demand that their leaders honor, love, and obey God in a real way? Pastors who want to engage in politics should leave the pastorate and run for office. The pastor can talk about issues and preach the Bible, but he needs to drop his political issues.

It's no mystery that God is an opponent of homosexuality, abortion, and a whole host of other modern problems. Preach Jesus and explain God's view and people will make the right decision. Stop trying to impress us with your great power, your political aspirations, and your friendship with "people in Washington." We don't care and God doesn't either.

Chapter Three

Building Programs and Budgets

Many of the so-called mega-churches are in a constant state of building. They have to have more Sunday school rooms, more parking lots, more, more, and more. I have no problem with building a church, Sunday school rooms, or parking lots. I have a problem when the basis for doing so is personal prestige or power. You are accountable to God for the way you spend your money and what is so-often referred to as “God’s” money.

Would He really approve of your new building design? Is He really impressed that you felt like you needed the five-million dollar education building instead of the two-million dollar version? Our prayers become very assumptive when we’re trying to pull the wool over God’s eyes. God notices when we ask him to bless our plans and prosper our way, but we don’t really consult him on the specifics. I understand God as wanting to be in control of my life, my daily activities, my thoughts, and my actions. I understand him as wanting to be in control of every aspect of your ministry and building program. It doesn’t matter if you have fifteen thousand people in your church if your really aren’t leading them the way Christ wants them led. They aren’t just wallets attached to human wills that you must convince to build your empire—they are people, souls, who deserve to know God, and deserve to see you leading them to God.

Chapter Four

White-Washing Christianity

What is being preached by many of today's Christian leaders? They sound like intolerant little children, not men of God. I affirm what most of them affirm and I deny what most of them deny, but the tone is really wrong. We need to be people of God. God sets the tone.

There is an over-emphasis in many churches on the "power" of God. Power is never explained very well. It seems like God just empowers us to do whatever we want done. He is to us what spinach is to Popeye. All we do is fill up on God and then we can do anything we want. It's a powerful combination—God functioning as my power base and my will functioning as my god. It's lethal.

God is reduced to the almighty problem-solver, time-saver, wealth-producer, kid-fixer, and marriage-builder. He, however, never gets the opportunity to rule your life or be your Lord. He is there when you need him and magically vanishes when you don't. That's not Christianity—it's a modern day cult that has its roots in skewed Christian teachings.

Don't white-wash Christian teaching. Let God be God. Tell the people that God really is God. He loves people, sent his Son to die for them, resurrected Jesus from the dead, and wants to forgive, love, care for, and RULE them. He wants to be the King of their lives, not just some genie-in-a-church-bottle that can "fix" them when they're "broken." God isn't on standby. He's God all the time. He wants to be your Ruler each and every moment.

Chapter Five

Forgetting the Warnings of God

God issued some pretty stern warnings in both the Old and New Testaments to Christian leaders. Christian leaders are to be held to a higher standard. Christian leaders are expected to be speaking for God—not just using God. Christian leaders are expected to walk in love and obedience with God. Christian leaders are accountable to God and they are responsible for using their position in the proper way. God wants to walk and guide Christian leaders. God is more interested in people knowing him in his greatness than He is in making leaders famous, rich, or influential. Many leaders from the Old and New Testaments died in shame according to world’s standards because they followed the path of God. The author of Hebrews (11:13) tell us, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” None of us want to be “strangers and exiles on the earth”—we want to be successful, reasonably wealthy, and be known as someone who made a difference. God’s idea and ours may be different!

1.) Leaders are to gently shepherd the flock remembering that they work for the Chief Shepherd. One day every Christian leader will give account to the Chief Shepherd.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording

it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

--1 Peter 5:1-4

2.) Leaders are not to be playing favorites or looking for personal or even ministry wealth.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

--James 2:1-5

3.) Christians are to submit to their leaders. Their leaders will give an account for their ministry and lives. Christians should uphold their leaders in prayer.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us, for

we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. –Hebrews 13:17-18

4.) The leader's chief task is to love Christ. No true ministry can take place outside of a genuine love for Christ. Any other motive is unacceptable to God.

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"

--John 21:5-19

Chapter Six

Stop Using Me

Dear Pastor or Church Leader,

I'm not a pawn to be moved about your church chess board. I'm not a strategic option to be exercised as you figure out how to "grow your church." I'm a human being created and loved by God and waiting to be led to a deeper and more intimate relationship with God. That makes me vulnerable and it gives you a substantial amount of sway in my life. Don't abuse that power or my vulnerability. I'm counting on you to lead me—not use or abuse me to attain your personal or professional goals.

You are an under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd. You must act like him. You must learn from him. You must become like him in your daily life—loving God totally and loving others. You must die a certain death to your dreams, desires, and plans for greatness as He begins to unfold his plans for you.

Needing to See the Love of Christ in You,

Your Faithful Church Member

It's a shame that so many pastors of little churches are learning bad habits from the pastors of the big ones. People come to smaller churches because they feel more loved, more valued, more ministered to, and more a part of what's going on.

Chapter Seven

My Generation is Looking for Someone to Follow

I have been looking for spiritual mentors my whole life. I have found very few of them. Many of the pastors, seminary professors, and Christian leaders I know are far too busy. They have no time to invest in anyone outside of their normal work or ministry environments. Some of them are caught up working eighty hours a week and others barely make it in to the office.

My main goal has been to look for a mentor of good Christian character. There isn't much emphasis on character these days. I'm looking for someone who is honest, caring, concerned, godly, and real. I'm not looking for someone perfect because I'm not so sure such a person exists on this side of Heaven.

I'm not the only one. Scores of young adults and young people are looking for godly leaders. They (and I) want to be led. We want to learn. We want to become the people God wants us to be. Will you be the leader that people are looking for?

Will honesty, transparency, and love pervade your life? Will you take the necessary risk and be real with us and with God?

Part 2:
**Thinking About God, People, and
the Church**

Chapter One

Misunderstanding the Will of God

Many pastors claim that they are doing the “will” of God. The problem is that in many cases their “will of God” is very different from God’s “will of God”! The New Testament has more than one word for “will.” One word indicates more of an idea of “wish” and the other indicates “will.” Does God have a direct will for everyone in every single thing they do or is it sort of up in the air? Just how prescriptive is God?

The Bible clearly says that it is God’s will that each one of us be sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3). That is, we are directly told that it is God’s will that we draw closer to Christ. The goal is then set: we are to draw closer to Christ. It is not about fame, fortune, or even our future. It is about becoming the people of God that we were created to be.

God’s will is that we love Him more and more. Jesus taught in the Great Commandment that we are to love God completely and totally (Mark 12). We are also to love our neighbors. If we start to view the will of God as something to “be” instead of something to “do” then we will be much closer to the heart of God.

Often we get caught up in the “doing” of life and we forget about “being” the people we were created to be. I am not sure God always thinks in terms of what He wants done. Man’s emphasis is steadily and consistently focused on “doing,” but God’s is not.

God's providence can then be considered in light of his eternal goal for humanity: that we become lovers of God and lovers of other people. Those who have trusted Christ are "in Him" (John 17:21). The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father. Christians are seen by God under the righteous covering of the Son. Paul teaches in Romans 8 that God is orchestrating things in life for our ultimate good. He is helping us to pray and "working all things" for us (Romans 8). In other words, everything that is happening gives us yet another opportunity to love and serve God and our neighbors more and more. Each thing that occurs in life has been permitted or completely orchestrated by God in order for us to become the people of God.

Some things just occur as a result of the fall and God does not take any responsibility for them such as the man born blind. Other things occur because of direct sin and disobedience. Yet other things occur as a result of God's punishment or blessings. And, things happen because God has designed them for our betterment. One cannot just lump everything together and necessarily come up with a cohesive theology of providence. God's providence is, in many respects, a mystery.

Whatever it means or does not mean, one must certainly remember that God loves his children and is caring for and protecting each one of them. Additionally, God grants us the opportunity to know and love him better with each passing day. There are prayers to pray, songs to sing, sermons to be preached, and neighbors to love.

God's will is that we become the friends of God we were intended to be.

God is certainly looking out for his children. He may permit suffering to come so that they may be changed or be “conformed to his image” (Romans 8:29). He may grant special blessings just because He desires to. Man is a creature—not the Creator. The Creator has the prerogative to care or not to care. Our Creator cares. And, He is busy helping to shape each of us into the people He wants us to be.

More emphasis on “who” we are to become and less emphasis on “what” we are to do would probably lead to a much healthier view of God's providence. God is definitely all-knowing and all-seeing. There is nothing that escapes his attention. He is kind and gracious to bring both blessing and trials into the lives of his children so that we might become all that we were intended to be.

Chapter Two

God's Dream for Humanity

God's dream for humanity was that we would be his friends. Humans were made in the image of God that is, we have personality, emotions, will, and intellect. God could talk with us. We could communicate and engage in mutual activities and conversations. God did not create man because He was lonely. He simply wanted to have communion with other beings. Of course, God has the angels and apparently communicates with them quite regularly. For some reason unbeknownst to us, God wanted to create men and women.

Adam and Eve were given everything one might possibly want. They lived in a perfect place, had a perfect relationship with God, and had the entire world at their disposal. Often we hear people remark that if they "only had more" then they would be able to do or be more. This lie has existed almost since the beginning of time. It really is the lie of Satan. More is not always better. Humanity was created to focus completely and totally on God.

God, of course, can always make his dreams come true! I suppose as do many others that God could have simply created beings that would always do his will. Apparently God was up for more of a challenge and wanted to create beings that had the power of choice. After all, to be created in the image of God would mean that one had the power to decide certain things.

And, man did decide. The underwhelming thing about man is his constant capacity to make poor decisions. For some reason poor options are very attractive to mankind! Man was created with the

entire world at his disposal but chose to throw it all away. Adam and Eve apparently had tremendous intellectual capabilities. The thought of naming all of the animals would be quite an exercise in human intellect. Being the first of any kind without any genetic defect or deficiency must have meant that both of them were quite beautiful. Their reasoning abilities were unhampered by sin or the effects of sin for a time. The dream of living a perfect life was actually a reality for a while.

Then, of course, man sinned. He traded in peace for fear, faith for doubt. He was consumed by his actions and hid from his Maker. The very people who were created to be God's community were hiding from God. Tragedy not only struck Adam and Eve, but the very God who made them. God is never surprised, but that did not alleviate his concern and sadness about the situation.

Man had chosen to trade his unlimited capabilities for a limited existence. Today because of the effects both genetically and practically man is quite limited. Man often thinks of the obstacles instead of the possibilities. Man often thinks of himself instead of God or his fellow human beings. Man is quite self-centered. He is forever trying to regain that which he threw away. Man wants a paradisiacal life. He wants to escape death but appears to be hemmed in on every side.

Man is sickly because of sin—whether it be his own or the generational effects. Man is often hopeless because he refuses to come

into communion with God. Man is wandering and helplessly falling further and further from God even though God is everywhere present. Man cannot see God. He often cannot feel him. Man is lost and separated from God.

Man is often unaware of his amazing potential. There is a motivational speaker here or there who encourages him, but he really does not believe it. The few who believe in their personal power may experience a somewhat higher quality of life because they see that there are many things that they do have the power to accomplish. However, they miss the point and their success never lasts long. The point is not accomplishment, but relationship with the One who created them.

The relationship then allows one to be transformed and to be re-created by God's regenerative and redemptive power. The Holy Spirit takes control and guides the believer. The believer is shaped and molded into the person he/she was originally created to be. And, finally the person realizes that they can commune with God. The very purpose for which they exist can finally be realized!

Man is made up of body, soul, and spirit. There are those who believe that soul and spirit are the same thing. I think it is fair to say that man has a body and a spirit and that when he has breath he "becomes a living soul." Man's soul is the very essence of his life. Man's body is decaying and will eventually die. When man stands

before God, he will be given a new, glorified body. His spirit goes to be with God. It is the truly eternal part of man.

When man finally arrives in Heaven, he will be able to live out his highest dreams. There will be neither limitations nor temptations. Distractions will be gone. Man will walk in right relationship (friendship) with his God. God's purposes will be man's desires. And, man's desires will be granted because they are God's purposes. Man will finally get to live-out and use all of the potential that was given to him.

Of course, those who never walk with their Maker shall be cast into eternal punishment. They will not only endure physical, mental, and spiritual torture, but they will know that their potential will never be realized. They will never fulfill the purpose for which they were created because they were unwilling to look to the Savior.

Salvation is not just about human potential or having one's sins forgiven, salvation is about the relationship that one can have with God right now. God desires to help humanity become "who" it was created to be. Jesus died to make it possible for man and God to talk again. The Spirit makes it possible for men to walk in truth, wholeness, and holiness. The church stands as the wonderful body of Christ here on earth comprised of the saved from every nation. The church is the community of those who long to commune with God.

Chapter Three

Thinking about the Incarnation of Jesus

The incarnation of Jesus represents one of the greatest mysteries the world has ever experienced. The fact that God would take on the form and being of a man is strange enough, but the idea that this God-man would come and live on the earth is even stranger. The Apostle John used the word “tabernacled” to indicate that Jesus had come to live on earth with his creation and with his people.

The unfortunate lack of welcome that He received is a testimony to the poor state in which man has brought himself. John states that He “came unto his own and they received him not.” His very people from his very nation did not receive him. They could have verified his lineage with the Temple records. They could have measured his words against those that the Prophets spoke years before. They did, in fact, know who He claimed to be, but they wanted nothing to do with him.

The world (all those who are not Jewish in this instance of the word) simply did not recognize him. They did not know him. The very God who had created them and given them the breath of life was not recognized when He appeared in his own domain. The Apostle John wants us to understand that Jesus came because of the wickedness of man. He became a man because of man. He suffered because of man’s lack of interest in doing the right thing.

The very God who had existed before time came in time as a baby to the captive nation of Israel. He came, however, to bring

salvation to the world—not just those in Israel. Jesus came with a “world” mindset. He came to invite both Jew and Gentile back into good standing with God. He came to make the renewed relationship possible.

One of the key passages in thinking about the incarnation is Philippians Two. There are several questions that arise in pondering how the incarnation of Jesus was accomplished. One such question is whether Jesus continued to be God while He was a man. The other main question is whether He continues to be a man now in Heaven while He is God. He is the God-man. He is both God and man. Although it transcends our ability to understand, He is fully and completely God and man at the same time. He is not just a “superman” with special powers and abilities—He is very God and very man.

The Apostle Paul speaks of Jesus “emptying himself.” This phrase has caused some to think that Jesus emptied himself of being God. They have in their minds sort of a divine costume change. He was “playing God,” but now it is time to play man so He went to the eternal dressing room and changed into the proper costume. This could not be further from reality. Jesus emptied himself by “taking the form of a bond-servant” and by “being made in the likeness of men.” He did not empty himself of his deity. He was and is still God. He became a man, too.

Several cultic ideas of Jesus started in the early history of the church and have multiplied recently. Some of them include the idea that Jesus became a man for a while and then stopped being man. Others say that Jesus was not really God, but more like an angel. Yet others say that Jesus was not really a man. And, still others say Jesus was not really God. The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus is the God-man. He is one-hundred percent God and one-hundred percent man.

Certainly this is hard to understand. We are not instructed to try to figure out the whole process of the incarnation, only to study what God has said about it in his Word. One of the greatest details about the incarnation is the fact that Jesus chose to “be born of a woman.”

Why was Jesus born like any other human being? Why was Mary chosen to give birth to him? Why was He born in Israel? Why was He born in the First Century? There are a host of questions one could ask about the incarnation of Jesus. The important observation is that Christ was born! Christ wanted to show his solidarity with humanity by being born naturally. He wanted people to understand that He was fully human. He suffered not just like a human, but as a human. When the author of Hebrews indicates that Christ understands suffering because He suffered, one can grasp the fact that Christ had emotions, He had feelings, He had a real, physical human body. He could feel and experience pain.

The God-man was not impervious to the pains, frustrations, and defeats of life. He was God, but He was the God-man who could and did suffer. He did not take the high road and avoid pain and agony—He took the lowly human road which was marked with many hurts for him. The God-man is humble and merciful. The God-man is understanding. The God-man can and did feel pain. He can suffer emotionally. He can have his feelings hurt. He can suffer and die.

And, die He did. The purpose of the incarnation was that He might redeem mankind. God's holiness and justice must be satisfied. He cannot just wipe the slate clean. Someone must pay for the sins of the world. There must be a better Lamb. There must be a perfect human being to pay the price for all those who were unwilling to walk with God. The ultimate sin of betrayal must be vanquished by the ultimate mark of obedience.

Jesus came to earth as the God-man to die. God sent himself to die on a cross for the sins of his creation. God would himself pay the price of being just and holy. Jesus was capable of dying. The pain He endured on the cross was for the sins of the world. He was the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2). He was raised from the dead by God himself (Eph. 1:20). He stands as the victorious God-man raised from the dead. He has been exalted to the highest place (Phil. 2:9-10).

The God-man is the risen Lamb. The Lamb who has been slain is standing (Rev. 5:6). He is waiting for the time to bring his people home. He is the victorious One. He will come again for his people.

His work of redemption has been completed. He paid the ultimate price. The God of the ages became a man to pay the price for his creation's sin. They now can walk and talk with him because He was willing to walk and talk with them. Humility is not an adequate word to describe God.

In light of the incarnation, Christians should walk as Christ walked. Humility should be the hallmark of Christianity. Love, kindness, and devotion to doing what is right should characterize Christians. Life is full of opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ to others. Jesus proclaimed that his people should "love one another" as He had loved them (John 13:33-34). The incarnation of Christ leaves us a model of love for one's God and love for their neighbors. He has made salvation and the victorious Christian life a possibility. He is, as Peter said, our "example" (1 Peter 2:21).

Chapter Four

Some Thoughts about the Church and Philosophy of Ministry

A person's philosophy of ministry hinges upon several other things. A few that come to mind are his/her theological background, denominational affiliation, ministerial history particularly regarding successes and failures in ministry, and theological reflection. I come from a very conservative theological background. My theological reflection has been guided by a Christian college experience and many years of seminary coursework. I have spent untold hours discussing my philosophy of ministry with anyone who will listen!

Some Thoughts about What I Believe About the Church and Philosophy of Ministry

1.) Unfortunately, the American church is more cultural than biblical sometimes. So much of the tradition of the American church is wrapped up around the steeple and the pews. Obviously, I understand that there are many important facets surrounding the American church's history and traditions, but there is much confusion as well. I am a patriotic American, who loves my country, but church is not about patriotism or even America for that matter--it is about Christ. Politics isn't a pulpit issue—the Bible is. It's not wrong to teach on morality or moral principles, but the church wasn't designed to wield political power. We follow some of our traditions, but are well aware of the need to follow the biblical mandates of Scripture and implement creative methods of organization, worship, and preaching.

2.) The church was created to be the center of Christian spirituality. There is another church in town that has been growing for

some time. They have raised well over a million dollars for their new building project. Nearly everything at the church rotates around the building project. One of my best friends has invited me to attend several special meetings of the church so that I could familiarize myself with “the way things work” in a big church. He has been disappointed by his pastor and church staff because there was a greater emphasis on raising capital funds than there was on how many people were going to be won to Christ this year. The American church has become a business. Certainly there is a business aspect to any ministry, but the central message of the early church was that Jesus lived, died for sinners, and is our resurrected hope. They believed that lives could be changed by the living Christ. That message has faded to the background in many churches, but it is strong and prevalent in ours.

3.) The early church believed that it was to be attached to the presence of Christ and the Spirit. Those who lived during the New Testament understood the importance of abiding in Christ and in being filled with the Spirit. They longed to enjoy the presence of God and found His approval to be more important than anything else in life. The church must place a strong emphasis on loving Jesus and on “being the person God has called you to be.”

4.) The church is to be anchored in the Bible. We must “test the spirits” as John said. The Bible is our objective standard. If it is not biblical, we should be very cautious about accepting it!

5.) The church is to be genuine. Jesus never encouraged people to “fake it.” He never said that you should hide your sins, get all dressed up, and stop by the church for an hour while pretending like everything in your life is fine and dandy. Jesus honestly and openly confronted people. He forgave them. He gave them hope. He inspired them to live lives that were real and honest before God and a watching world. The modern church has all but lost this idea.

6.) The church is about relationships. Jesus ministered for three years, but was it simply to teach? No, Jesus ministered to teach and to build relationships. The two go hand-in-hand. Jesus understood that man was created to be relational and that man must function within a right community. Jesus taught much about community by the way He lived. The church is to teach community as well. Unity was the central concern of some of Jesus’ most poignant prayers. People need a home in which to live and function. The “Family of God” is supposed to be more than a song we sing during the offering. It was important to Jesus--it should be important to us as well.

7.) The church is to be growing. The early church had boundless energy even in the face of persecution and death. The church grew. Our churches often grow by transfer growth, but we have never been called to be “porters for the already saved,” we are to be winning the lost and discipling them.

8.) The church is about missions. Unfortunately, many in the

church only equate missions with giving. Missions is close to the heart of God. We should be engaged in supporting missions financially and prayerfully, but we should also “go.” There should be a holy fire under our saddles to meet the cultures of the world and share the Good News of Jesus with them.

What Many People in My Area Believe About Church

1.) The building is the church. People are mystical and many are drawn to the aura of an old church or cathedral. The problem is that church is not a building. Many churches preach this and then raise millions of dollars to pour into a new building. They always say that the new building is to reach the lost, but where do you find lost people in church in the New Testament? The lost were generally won outside of church and then brought into the church. I am not against buildings or building programs, but the church is not a building. People are tired of the church saying one thing and then modeling something else.

2.) A little spirituality goes a long way. Church attendance is the measurement for spirituality for many people. They have honored God with their presence for an hour on Sunday morning and He should be glad they did. Devotions, spiritual disciplines, and extreme faith are only for those who are pastors or headed to the mission field.

3.) Many believe either that pastors have special privileges and are allowed to twist the truth or that they are on a mission to rip people off. There has been a rash of church scandals in our area over the last

few years. Many wonderful church people have been transformed from supporters to doubters because of the way they were manipulated and used by crooked pastors. Some pastors in our area practically ask people to lick the dust off of their boots while others use the church bank account as if it was their own.

A Sample for Implementation

Empowerment and Life-Change

We believe that believers should be empowered to live the victorious Christian life. We do not issue a list of things “not to do” in our church. Our leaders attempt to model balanced, holy lives for the people. We think that Christians have been empowered to live for the Lord. The church should be a safe refuge for people where they can steadily and consistently have their lives changed. We really focus on being transparent with the Lord and spending time with him. We are careful to note that the Christian life is a process of living whereby people must intentionally decide to live and function for Christ. Our philosophy revolves around the central thought that Christianity is about a personal relationship with Jesus. Many churches speak only of the “initial meeting,” that is, when a person comes to know Jesus. We attempt to talk about the on-going relationship with Jesus and how that works out into our lives and ministries.

Our preaching is exegetical, exciting, and real. We do not push for false emotion, but we are not afraid of emotions either. When we’re worshipping, our focus is to sing “to” Jesus rather than merely

singing “about” him, although we realize the importance of both. We also spend a lot of time with each member of the congregation building friendships and enjoying non-church related activities.

World-Change

We believe that the work of the ministry must flow out of an ever-increasing love relationship with Jesus. Therefore, we focus on spending time with God, reading His Word, singing unto Him, and living the victorious Christian life. We encourage every person in our church to “do” the work of the ministry after they have secured and are enjoying their on-going relationship with Jesus. We say that “every attender is a missionary.” The old byline of so many churches was that “every member is a minister.” We are not persuaded that church “membership” accomplishes a whole lot. In the minds of many, ministry has come to be known as something other than service for Christ. We want people to identify themselves with the Great Commission. We have a nearly inordinate focus on missions in our church! We also talk about, pray for, and spend a lot of time promoting world-wide missions. We tie personal evangelism and discipleship (even local and personal events) to world-wide missions. We want people to know that they are part of something much bigger than whatever may be going on in our little corner of the world.

A Place to Call “Home”

We attempt to repeatedly stress the importance of being a

family in Christ. We believe that feeling at home in the body of Christ is of paramount importance to “being” what you were created to be. As a result, we have attracted a number of attenders who come from broken and dysfunctional homes. We have seen a real boost in their zest for life and a desire to spend time with other church people outside of scheduled church activities.

About Paul Heier

Paul Heier has served as a pastor, college professor, teacher, and consultant. He completed his doctoral project on how to effectively train Nicaraguan church leaders. His first book entitled, *Leading Out of Love*, received outstanding reviews and is currently being translated into Spanish. He is a graduate of Clearwater Christian College, Tyndale Seminary, Columbia International University, and Logos Christian Graduate School. He did additional doctoral work at The King's Seminary. He currently serves as the director of Mision Hispana Mission Society and is a favorite speaker in Central America and the U.S. He and his wife, Thania, live and work in Central America. He can be contacted through Mision Hispana's website at www.HopeForCentralAmerica.com.

Short-Term Missions Trip

Mision Hispana hosts teams from the U.S. and Canada to Nicaragua and Costa Rica. We love to host teams (big or small) and can help you have a spiritually productive, safe, and fun trip. We will tailor the trip to meet your goals and we only take you to safe locations. Please feel free to contact us at the website above with any questions or comments.

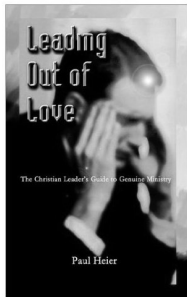
Supporting Missionaries

Like most missionaries, we find ourselves trusting the Lord for our daily provisions. We invite you to explore supporting us and the ministry we do here in Central America. Please visit us at the website above.

Please check out some of Paul's other books:

Leading Out of Love, a book on
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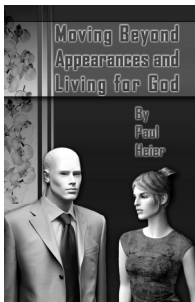
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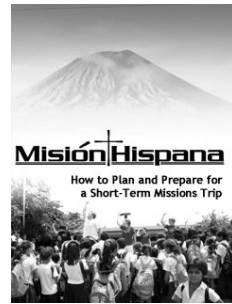
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