

6 More Ways to Restore Shallow Local Churches to Their Fullness

Note: This is part 2 in a two-part series.

Last week, I listed the top four things the local church must do to restore its fullness. The following are the rest of the things the local church must do to restore its fullness:

5. **Recapture the practice of catechesis.** With the advent of the Protestant Reformation came about a tendency for non-Catholics to do away with all traditions of the church not directly practiced in the New Testament. (To be consistent, these same people should do away with the practice of Sunday school because that is also not practiced in the New Testament church). One of the most important practices the early (2nd century and beyond) church developed was to catechize new believers (sometimes for as long two to three years) before they were accepted as baptism candidates.

In the context of this article, the word “catechism” has to do with either written or oral instruction related to the first principles of the faith. (See Heb. 5:11-6:4.) Historically it has been a series of written questions with fixed answers and or precepts used for instruction that grounded new believers in the faith. This practice was initially launched by the early church fathers in its nascent form in a first century document called the *Didache*, which was comprised of teachings regarding Christian ethics, rituals such as baptism and communion, church organization along with instructions on how to treat traveling apostles and prophets, as well as the need to recite the Lord’s prayer and so forth.

Nowadays, many contemporary non-denominational evangelical

churches have virtually no process or rites of passage for new believers and are essentially often baptizing “pagans.”

Consequently, the contemporary church is often “a mile long and an inch wide” in regard to sound biblical teaching and discipleship. Recapturing the practice of catechesis, for both young children (done by parents along with the church) as well instituting a process as the criteria whereby people can qualify for baptism is an important step towards restoring the church back to its calling and fullness.

6. Recapture missions. The early church never separated its existence from its primary calling and mission. The last words Jesus spoke over His disciples before His ascension reiterated the fact that the church existed as a community of people to be His witnesses in every city and nation (see Acts 1:8,9).

Hence, the church was never separated organically from its intrinsic mission from its founding.

The present-day church is so far from this ontological understanding of its essence that it depends upon parachurch organizations and mission agencies in order to train and launch its congregations into short-term or long-term mission expeditions. If the church is ever going to recapture its fullness, it has to become missional again!

7. Recapture the purpose of the church of Acts. Acts 1:1,2 clearly states that the Gospels record the narrative of what Jesus “began” to do and teach—which framed the rest of the Acts narrative by depicting what Jesus continues to do through His church by the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is not primarily called to be a social club or have nice Sunday attendance, preaching and worship experiences. The church is called to continue the works of Jesus, which is also why Jesus expects us to not only continue His works but to do greater works than He did, because He went to the Father and continues

to work through us corporately through the Holy Spirit (See John 14:12-13).

Unless we use the Gospels as our primary reference point for how to think, act and serve like Jesus, and unless we use the epistles as our primary reference to practically apply the life of Jesus in the context of our family and church, we will continue to fall short and never recapture the fullness of God's design for the body of Christ.

8. Recapture the call to be a benefactor community. The apostle Paul admonished the church to do good to all men, especially to the household of Faith (see Gal. 6:10). That being said, Paul also commanded the church to benefit all people—not just people in the church. As we read in Titus 3:8, Paul says that those who have believed would be careful to engage in good deeds. Then he makes it clear that these good deeds are to be profitable for all men—not just those in the church.

He also stated in the previous chapter that Jesus redeemed and purified us for Himself so that we would be zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14). Since he does not seem to indicate these good deeds are to be confined within the local church, we have to come to the conclusion that Jesus has called the church to be a blessing to its surrounding community—to serve, pray and bless it, and become a sort of benefactor community to its neighbors. This goes along with what God told Jeremiah regarding the children of Israel in Babylonian captivity. He commanded the Jewish people to build houses, plant gardens, build families, eat their produce and seek the welfare of the city and pray for it (see Jer. 29:4-7). Jesus called His followers to function as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). If the church is going to restore its fullness, it has to become community-centric—not just merely inwardly focused.

9. Recapture the essence of the church as a missional people

(don't depend upon crusade evangelism). When we think about evangelism today, we have pictures of street preachers with bullhorns or huge crusades with well-known, gifted evangelists. This methodology was unheard of in the early New Testament church. When people were sent out to preach, they never launched out in major ministry without the blessing and planning of their local church (see Rom. 10:15, Acts 13:2).

Furthermore, Paul refused to evangelize beyond the capacity, resources, and faith of the local churches in his region—hence, he never separated evangelism from the context of the local church. He said to the church “that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you” (See 2 Cor. 10:15b-16a, NASB).

We see virtually the same principle modeled by the church of Thessalonica, when Paul commended them because from them (their local church) the word of the Lord sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. (In other words, Paul did not have to preach to those regions because the local church he founded in Thessalonica was doing the evangelizing (see 1 Thess. 1:8).

If the local church is going to be restored back to its fullness, it has to recapture its call to proclaim the gospel and continue to expand the borders of the influence of the kingdom of God without depending upon famous preachers coming to town to hold a crusade.

10. Recapture Word and Spirit focus. Jesus stated that the Father is seeking for people to worship Him in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23-24). He also stated in another place that people were in error because they knew not the Scriptures nor the power of God (see Matt. 22:29). Unfortunately, most contemporary churches are either strong in the Spirit (charismatic churches) and weak in the Word, or strong in the

Word but weak in regard to expecting and allowing a strong move of the Holy Spirit (many more theologically inclined churches).

If the church is going to recapture its fullness, we need to have a robust theological focus in our preaching, discipleship, youth meetings and Scripture application to daily life—as well as a strong focus in fasting, prayer and allowing God to move supernaturally in our midst by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some people are so rationalistic that they either have a (truncated) Bible without present-day miracles (because they are cessationists) or they intellectually believe in the power of God but are afraid to allow God to move because they fear “wildfire”. However, I would rather have wildfire than have no fire at all, in the same way I would not want a biblically illiterate, subjective church with no grounding in the truth.

If the church is going to be restored to its fullness, it needs to embrace both spirit and truth, and know the Scriptures as well as the power of God.

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