

Systematic Theology
What in the World Should the Church Be Doing? (Part 1)
Selected Scriptures
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Tonight we come to really the last of our studies in the doctrine of the church. It will be two parts beginning tonight and finishing up next week, but the major question that we want to ask and answer is What in the world should the church be doing?

My files are filled with bizarre examples of what churches think that they should be doing. There is an article that I have explaining that seeker sensitive churches all across America, in an effort to reach more people, and even admittedly to pay their huge mortgages for buildings they probably shouldn't have built, are housing a variety of businesses. Congregations, the article says, from Seattle to Jacksonville, Florida are opening on-site fast food restaurants, hair salons, coffee bars, outdoor bistros, movie theaters, gyms, and brand name franchises from McDonalds to Starbucks. Now, I know a few of you are going to approach me afterward and say "what about that Starbucks"?

There are a number of articles I have documenting the new mission for the church called for by the emerging church movement. For example, one article from the Dallas Morning News just last year says that in a dark sanctuary, filled with votive candles, fast paced images flash across video screens. Participants file forward to write their names on a wooden cross on the floor while the DJ mixes new age music. Their rites and worship settings are unconventional, often more coffee house or college dorm ambiance than church. Many emerging churches weave together elements from different religious traditions, especially Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Some are renewing medieval mystical practices such as "walking the labyrinth".

At Solomon's Porch, an emerging church in Minneapolis, worshipers sit on couches and recliners, not in pews. Some of you are going to be after me for that too. The pastor doesn't preach sermons, instead he leads discussions, inviting comments from those in the audience.

For most in the movement, the foundational mission of the church is to engage the culture. Which to most, has nothing to do with communicating the message of Christ as redeemer from sin and its penalty. There are almost as many different ideas on what the church is to do on what it's mission really is as there are churches.

But the real question that you and I have to ask and answer is, “What about Christ? What is His design for His church?” What in the world does Christ say the church should be doing? What in the world should the church be doing? Well Christ certainly is not silent on the matter, and his answer is in no way muffled. In the clearest most direct words in scripture he lays out the churches marching orders. And those orders take us in three directions; up, in, and out.

We could put it differently. We could say that the church's mission is vertical, it's internal, and it's horizontal. Or to put it in its simplest terms, the church's mission includes God, the church itself, and the world. There's a very real sense in which the duties and responsibilities of the church, that three pronged emphasis of the church, is like a three legged stool. Remove any leg of a three legged stool, and the purpose of the stool is lost. Its functionality is gone. The same thing is true with the church. Remove any one of these emphases, and you have undermined the mission and purpose of the church. If any part of the church's mission is ignored, her mission to God, her mission to the church itself, or her mission to the world, then she loses, to some degree, her usefulness to her Lord. So it's absolutely essential that we as a church understand all three parts of the divine mandate, and that we seek to fulfill each of them to the glory of Christ.

Now, tonight I want us to start - Next week Lord willing we're going to look at the very specific responsibilities that we have in each of these three categories. The responsibilities the church has to God, the responsibilities the church has to itself internally, and the responsibility the church has to the world. But tonight, we need to start with some foundational and fundamental assertions. I want to begin with the governing principles of our discussion.

The first one is simply this: The duties of the church are equally shared by every member of the church. Now, some of you who are from particularly Baptist church backgrounds and

particularly if you were saved out of Catholicism, that is a revolutionary statement in and of itself. The duties of the church are equally shared by every member of the church. Jesus had made it clear that although there would be leaders in his kingdom, in the case of the church, the elders, they are not to be placed in a special category.

Turn to Matthew 23. During His earthly ministry, Jesus made this crystal clear to his disciples. The first twelve verses of this chapter - This chapter is commonly known as “the woes to the Pharisees”, but you'll notice that the woes don't begin until verse 13, the pronouncements of judgment directed directly against the Pharisees don't begin until verse 13. The first twelve verses instead are spoken to the crowds and especially to His disciples. He's teaching His disciples, by contrast, what they should be and do as leaders by contrast with the Pharisees.

Notice particularly, and this is a wonderful text and one someday we'll look at. I had the chance to study it in great detail and there's so many profound lessons here for leadership in the church. But just look for tonight with me at verse 6. Jesus, now again, teaching His disciples what not to do, the kind of leadership not to have, based on the Pharisees. He says in verse 6, “They love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the marketplaces, and being called Rabbi by men.” You know, isn't it true that you can tell anything about a man by what he loves? And notice what these scribes and Pharisees loved. They loved four things especially. But I want us to look just at the last one. They loved being called Rabbi by men. Rabbi is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that means, “master, great one, superior”. It could denote a master as opposed to a slave. It's even used as a royal title referring to the king of Israel. If someone called you Rabbi, he was confessing that you were, in fact, his superior. In the generation before Christ, this title came to be used as a title for the teachers of the law and it soon became seriously inflated. By Talmudic times, a Rabbi's status was so exalted that his disciple had to obey him without question, never walk in front of him, and never greet him first. And there were a whole list of dos and don'ts in terms of the Rabbis and how you were to interact with them. Apparently this trend had already begun in Christ's time. Jesus says that's what they love.

So in verse 8, he transitions to his disciples. In Greek, He emphasizes the word “you”. But you, as opposed to the scribes and the Pharisees, do not be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher and all are brothers. Don't accept titles that establish you as the exalted authority, because we're all fellow students of one teacher. Back when the early church father Ignatius addressed the Ephesians in a letter he wrote to them, he called them his schoolmates. That's the spirit of what Christ is teaching here.

Notice Jesus continues in verse 9. “Do not call anyone who is on earth your father, for One is your Father, who is in heaven”. You see, the designation “father” was often conferred upon the greatest of the Rabbis after their death. There's a sense, of course, in which we can be the spiritual father of others, but in the New Testament, it is never used as a title, and it's never used with a spirit of superiority. A person can only have one father, and ours is in heaven. Our fellow Christians are our peers and brothers. Notice in verse 10 he says, “Do not be called leaders, for one is your leader, that is Christ.” In Peter's words, there's only one chief shepherd, and it's Christ.

Now don't misunderstand, Jesus isn't forbidding the recognizing of spiritual leadership. As the great church historian Phillip Schaff says, “Pride taking the form of a lack of courtesy cannot find shelter here.” This is not an argument for egalitarianism. There will always be those who are our superiors in age, in gifts, in experience, and position. According to Romans 13:7, which says, “Render to everyone honor to whom honor”, we owe them proper respect. But here's the key, and this is what I want you to get. If a spiritual leader longs for his people to put him in a different class and treat him as their superior, he is violating this command.

Early on in my days at Grace Church, someone asked John MacArthur, “So why do you let your people call you 'John'? I mean, why not pastor MacArthur or Dr. MacArthur?” And I still remember his answer to this day, and he's given it a number of times. He said, “they call Paul Paul”. That's exactly right. There isn't to be that elevating sense.

Sadly it was less than two hundred years after the time that Jesus taught the apostles these words

that the New Testament church began to disregard these instructions. And it happened through the developing concept of clergy versus laity. It began naturally enough. The first visible evidence of this sort of growing breach between clergy and laity was a change in the clothing of the pastor of the church. In the earliest days, the preacher looked like everybody else. He simply dressed as the rest of the people in the congregation dressed, but by the 3rd century, the clergy had distinctive garments that indicated their position. And along with that distinctive clothing, soon came a distinctive hair style. I'm so glad there isn't a pastoral hair style today. Because you know how it is. Not surprisingly, the clothing style and the hair style that pastors were supposed to have were old and outdated like those of past generations.

But it didn't stop there. Inside the church buildings of the 3rd and 4th centuries, the distinction between clergy and laity became increasingly obvious. The pastor was formerly on the same level with the congregation. I'm not talking about a platform such as we have. We're talking about a significant elevation of the pastor or the teacher at a place on which he sat. He was now physically elevated for the entire service above the congregation. By the way, you need to know that that's why the elders and I of this church don't sit on this platform. It's not because there isn't room because the orchestra is up here. It is a Biblical and philosophical statement, that when we worship, we are one with you, we are one with the congregation in worshipping our Lord together. We are not elevated above you. We follow the model of Ezra in the Old Testament who for convenience to be seen and to be heard taught from a platform, but we don't elevate ourselves by sitting on and maintaining a separate distance from the congregation as if we weren't part of you.

Now by the end of the first century, another thing had happened. No longer were the simple terms 'pastor' or 'elder' or 'bishop' sufficient. The clergy had begun to arrange themselves into different levels of authority. No longer were pastor and bishop considered different names for the same office, the pastor now was considered to be at the bottom rung, above him was the bishop, and then came the arch-bishop. And of course as you know, if you're familiar with church history at all, by the middle-ages, the clergy claimed the titles and privileges of royalty. They were known as legates, and princes, and even potentates. Just call me potentate Pennington.

Another key change happened around the 3rd century. The office of deacon was changed from a lay position to a position occupied solely by the clergy. By the late 5th century the simple pastor had become a priest and was considered the link between the kingdom of God on Earth and its divine Head.

Another thing happened as a result of that. Some felt that he should remain celibate. That is, unmarried. The assumption was that this would cause him to be more holy. So the concept of two standards of morality was advanced. One level of conduct expected of the laity, and another level of conduct expected for the clergy.

Think about it now, different clothing, different hair style, different physical elevation in the church building, different titles, and now different standards of conduct. The separation of clergy and laity was complete, and the result of that was a new two-tiered system within the church that the New Testament knows nothing about. You had clergy, which by the way comes from the word 'klíros', which means 'lot', as in God's special possession. And laity, from 'laos', which speaks of the people. So you had priests on the one hand, or pastors, and you had lay people on the other. This is an unbiblical differentiation. What happened, of course, over time, is that the ministry became the job of this first set of people. The special lot of God, the special possession of God, the clergy. If something needs to be done, call the clergy and ask them to do it.

Now I go through that because many of you have grown up in and been accustomed to churches where this differentiation still exists to this day. If something needs to be done, call the pastor. But that is a patently unbiblical concept. Now that doesn't mean you can't call your pastor, but the concept of differentiating between the two and acting as if the people are the audience and the pastors are the ones who are responsible for doing the work of the ministry of the church is an unbiblical concept. In the New Testament, the ministry of the church is universally shared.

Remember the metaphors of the church that we looked at? We are all part of the royal priesthood, as Peter says in 1st Peter 2:9, and as John says in Revelation 1:6. We are all members

of the flock. We are all part of the holy temple that is the church. We are all members of Christ's body. We are all branches on the vine. We are all members of the family of God. We have all individually received a spiritual gift with which to minister as we saw in a number of texts. You get the point, that we are all equally to share the responsibility of the ministry of the church. The New Testament knows nothing of that two-tiered system of clergy and laity. Bob Sose, in his book on the church, puts it this way. He says, "In reality, the ministry of the church is the ministry of the spirit, which is divided among the various members, each contributing his gift to the total work of the church." What am I doing up here? Am I in some special elevated position? As an elder, I've been given, along with the other elders of this church the responsibility for leading this church, but we don't have an elevated position. Ours is a position as we saw of servant leadership. The reason I'm here is because I'm merely exercising the gift God gave me for the benefit of the rest of us. And you also are called up to use the gift God has given you for the benefit of the church. This is absolutely foundational to understanding how the church is to work. The duties of the church are equally shared by every member of the church.

A second foundational or governing principle is the duties of the church can be reduced to one key concept; serving. That's because the ministry of the church is effect a continuation of the ministry of Jesus. Listen to what Luke says as he introduces the book of Acts. He says, "The first account I composed, Theophilus," talking about the gospel of Luke, "The first account I composed about all that Jesus began to do and to teach." I love that. You see, Luke simply records what Jesus began to do and to teach, and the book of Acts documents what He continued to do and to teach. The ministry of the apostles and now the ministry of the church is in a sense the continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ to the world.

And what was the essence of the ministry of Jesus? It was service. In fact, Isaiah constantly refers to Him as the servant of Yahweh. Jesus Himself said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but He came to serve." And the most graphic and most important way in which He came to serve was to give His life as a ransom for many. So when we come to the ministry of the New Testament church, it's not surprising that her ministry, our ministry, corporately and individually, is to be a ministry of service. In fact, we're called on a

number of occasions “servants”. The New Testament even uses the language of slavery. 1 Corinthians 6:20, “You have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.”

Paul refers to the essence of his ministry as service in 1 Corinthians 9:19, “Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.” 2 Corinthians 4:5, “We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.” And the very same servant / slave language is used of every Christian service within the church. So this is our overarching duty. It's service. But what does that look like? How does that flesh out in the church?

I want us to go beyond those general principles, those foundational principles or governing principles, and secondly I want us to look at the overarching plan. What exactly is God's macro plan for the church? As I said, next week, we'll look very specifically at how the church is to function in each of those three avenues, toward God, toward itself, and toward the world, but in the time we have left tonight, I want us to look at that macro plan, that overarching plan that Christ has for the church.

Turn with me to Ephesians 4. Ephesians chapter 4 and look at verse 11. When I first came to Countryside, a little over three years ago now, we studied this passage in great detail. We're not going to do that tonight, but I do want to walk through two of its verses. Verse 11, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” There in a nut-shell is God's overarching plan for the church. You want to know what the church is to be about in the world? This is the essence, the overarching plan of how the church is to function. And God's plan for the church consists, as you'll see in these verses, of four distinct parts. A church that wants to be biblical, a New Testament church, should seek to follow the four parts of this divine plan for every church.

The first part of the plan is this; it's found in verse 11. Christ appoints the leaders of the church. Look at verse 11 again. “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as

evangelists, and some as pastor-teachers.” Not only did Christ give spiritual gifts to individual members of the church, but He also gave gifted men to the whole church. So exactly who are these gifted men that Christ has given to His church?

Well lets take the first two together; apostles and prophets. These two positions were foundational in the life of the church according to Ephesians 2:20. Their roles were two-fold. To receive and to declare God's revelation, and secondly, to confirm that word through signs and wonders and miracles. So to receive and declare God's revelation and to confirm the word through signs, wonders, and miracles. The title 'apostle' is used of the twelve. It's used of Paul. In Acts 14:4 it's used of Barnabas and in 1 Thessalonians 2:6 it's used of Silas and Timothy. It's also used of some other leaders in the church, but it's primarily used and here it's used, of those men whom Christ selected, the eleven, plus Paul, whom Christ selected, to be the declarers of His revelation. To be His mouthpiece in the world. Now the office of prophet in the early church, the office, listen carefully to the distinction I'm making; the office of prophet in the early church seems to be different than those who simply had the gift of prophecy as in 1 Corinthians 12:10. You can see there is a distinction apparently. So there are two different things. There's the gift of prophecy and there's the office of a prophet.

Both of these offices, apostles and prophets, disappeared with the completion of the canon. In Ephesians 2:20 you see that the church, and notice the tense that's used, “having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Their ministry was foundational to the life of the church. They brought to the church revelation. And now that the canon has been closed, has been completed, those offices are unnecessary. That may be why in 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul says “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.” That may even refer to the chronology in which Christ gave them to the church.

Now the third office that's mentioned is 'evangelist'. The term is used only here and of Phillip in Acts 21:8 and in 2 Timothy 4:5 where Paul tells Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. The Greek word is related to the verb meaning “to proclaim the good news”, and to the noun “gospel”. So the work of an evangelist is to proclaim the good news of forgiveness, to preach

the true gospel. In the New Testament, these men were missionaries and church planters who went to a region, evangelized, trained people in the word, and then moved on to another region. Our church supports a couple of true evangelists. There are also a couple of men in our church who seem to demonstrate the gift of evangelism, the ability to especially communicate the gospel as well.

The final office is the office 'pastor-teacher'. Now some see these are two different offices, but the construction in the Greek and the fact that these two responsibilities are usually combined in one office in the New Testament probably would mean that it's referring to one office, that of pastor-teacher. These are the leaders that Christ has given to His church. That's the first part of the great overarching plan that Christ has for His church.

The second part of the plan is this, and you find it in the first part of verse 12. Christ appoints the leaders of the church and then those leaders equip the members of the church. Notice verse 12. It says He gave these leaders "for (for the purpose of) the equipping of the saints." Now the best way to understand the relationship of these three clauses is that they build on each other. The leaders equip the saints, which enables the saints to do the work of service, which as a result, causes the church to be built up. It's like the old adage, you don't give a man a fish, you teach him how to fish. That's what the leaders of the church are to do. They're not to do the ministry, they're to teach the people how to do the work of ministry. My role, and that of the elders, is not to do as Paul says here "the work of service", but to equip you to do it.

So how exactly do the leaders of the church go about doing this? Well God has given the elders of this church and of every church primarily two tools. Primarily two tools that we have to use. The first is the teaching of God's word. Luke 6:40 makes it clear that much of equipping is teaching. It says "a pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained (or equipped), will be like his teacher." So teaching is absolutely foundational to equipping. That's what I'm doing tonight. That's what I did this morning. That's what the other elders do as they teach various classes and you sit under their leadership. Remember the title given to pastors, pastor-teacher? How does the spiritual shepherd feed his sheep? Do you remember

Christ told Peter “shepherd my lambs, feed my sheep”? That means that people are equipped through the teaching of the Word of God. That's how we feed the sheep. You can be a shepherd, but you won't be a shepherd for long, of literal physical animals, if you don't feed the sheep. The same is true of a spiritual shepherd. Our chief responsibility is to feed the sheep. And that's through teaching the Word of God. And that is verbal instruction. Verbal instruction of the Word of God.

But teaching isn't just verbal instruction. It is verbal instruction, but it isn't just verbal instruction. The elders and I can teach you by being an example, an example of serving. There's so many passages that talk about this. We teach you God's Word both by verbal instruction and by our example. John 13:15, Jesus says "For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you." Jesus said you are learning from me, both through my words, and through my example. This is part of teaching God Word to you. Part of the beauty of being a pastor of a church and being there for a long time, Lord willing, being here for a long time, is you get to see me and my family and you get to see the other elders and their families go through all of the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and tragedies of life, and by our example, hopefully we teach you the Word of God. By our trust in God, by our confidence in His goodness and His sovereignty and His grace.

Not only by verbal instruction but by serving. Philippians 3:17 "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." 2 Thessalonians 3:9, Paul says I want to “offer myself as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.” 1 Timothy 4:12 “Show yourself”, Paul tells Timothy ,”an example of those who believe.” Titus, he says the same thing. “In all things, show yourself to be an example of good deeds.” 1 Peter 5:3 "nor yet as lording it over those”, talking to the elders here, “nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but instead proving to be examples to the flock."

But in addition to teaching by word and by example, there's another way that I and the spiritual leaders of this church can ensure that you're equipped. You see, ultimately, God is the only one who can really equip you. That's why the verb form of this word occurs in Hebrews 13:20 in the

middle of a prayer to God. It says "Now may the God of peace equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ." There's a prayer. "May God equip you". It's a prayer. That's why the apostles committed themselves to two things. The ministry of the Word of God, and prayer, because those are the primary tools spiritual leaders have to equip the saints.

You realize that this is all I can do? I have no capacity to get inside your head and to change you. Just as I have no capacity to get inside my own head and change me. What I have at my resource is what the other elders have at their resources, is the teaching of the Word of God and prayer. Explaining the truth of God to you, living the truth of God before you and serving you, and by praying that God will equip you as the writer of Hebrews says. In every good thing do His will. So the leaders of Countryside are to equip you by teaching in word and example and by praying that God would equip you through His Word.

So this is the plan. The overarching plan is Christ appoints the leaders of the church, the leaders equip the members of the church, and the third part of the plan is members accomplish the service of the church. Members accomplish the service of the church. Look at the second part of verse 12. "For the work of service." He gave these leaders in order to equip the saints and what specifically are the leaders to equip the saints to do? "The work of service."

Now the Greek word translated 'work' is the normal word for work, but the word for 'service' here is interesting. It comes from the word 'deacon'. It's a general word for any kind of service. It's used in Acts 6:4 to refer to the ministry of the Word. It's used in Acts 12:24 to refer to missionary work. But it's often used as a general word to speak of whatever is done for God and in His name. And as such, it even describes everyday service.

For example it's used to describe preparing food, it's used to describe serving food, and in Acts 6 it's used to describe serving food to widows. So the members are to be equipped by the leaders to do the work of service. Every member in the church is to be involved in service at some level. From teaching God's Word to preparing food, and everything in between. That's the work of

service. What it really means is that you have a responsibility to use the gift, the spiritual giftedness that God has given you, for the good of this church. You and I have no right to attach ourselves to a church and wander in and out every week.

Somebody said that the church is made up of two kind of pillars. There are the pillars that support the church, and there are the caterpillars that crawl in and out every week. You have no right to be a caterpillar. Every member of the church is to be providing service in the church. This was Christ's plan. This isn't my plan. This isn't the sort of offload some work from me, this is Christ's plan for the church. And so if you are a part of a church, if you're in Christ, you should be part of a church, and if you're part of a church, then you are to be serving in that church. You are to be using the giftedness God gave you for the good of the body. It could be anything from teaching the Word to serving donuts. Serving people in real and practical ways. But serving it must be. The work service.

So the overarching plan is simple. Christ appoints the leaders of the church, leaders equip the members of the church, members accomplish the service of the church, and finally, the outcome will be the growth of the church. Notice verse 12 again. "To the building up of the body of Christ." That clause summarizes the result of the plan. If the plan is done properly; if Christ has done His part, He has appointed the leaders of the church, He's given gifted men to the church; if they do their part and equip the members of the church, and if the members of the church do their part and do the work of service, accomplish the work of service, then here is what happens. The body of Christ is built up.

There's a beautiful image behind that expression. It's of erecting a building. I served for a number of years in one of the building trades. I worked as an electrician. And you know, if it was fascinating to watch a structure being built. Some of you have seen time lapse photography of a building being built. If you watch it over a number of months and then you take the time lapse photography and you watch it in just a few seconds. See that structure start, the most basic process of clearing a spot of land, and then the foundation is laid, and then the major supporting structure walls goes up, and then some roof structure, and then finally some skin is put on the

outside and the inside and all of the additional wonderful pieces are added. That's the picture behind this phrase. When we do our part, when all of this plan works, it is a beautiful thing, and it causes the building up of the body of Christ. When a church has gifted men appointed by God, identified by the elders, confirmed by the congregation, and those gifted men are teaching and equipping the people, and the people are mixing the teaching with their gifts and serving, then the members individually, and the church as a whole, grows. That's the divine plan for the church. That is Christ's plan for this church.

Now let me encourage you to take a personal inventory. Look again, let me simplify it for you. Christ appoints the leaders, leaders equip the members, members accomplish the service, the outcome will be the growth of the church. Let me ask you a question. If you're a leader of this church, are you doing your part to equip the members for the work of service? Let me ask you, as a member of this church, as part of this congregation, this flock, are you doing the work of service? Are you using the giftedness God has given you in His church? This is the plan of Christ. And when all of that happens, it's the building up of the body of Christ.

Now let me end where I started. You know the amazing thing about this plan, is it is working, and it will work, because nothing ultimately can stand in the way of the plan that Christ has put in place. This is what I love.

I played football in high school, not extremely well. And a couple of years not on a winning a team. And a couple of years I was on a winning team, my junior and senior year. And let me tell you, it was a whole lot more fun being on a winning team than it was on a losing team. Let me tell you something, brothers and sisters. We are on the winning team. That's what I love about that song. "O church, arise and put your armor on." Because this is going to happen. This was the plan conceived in eternity past, and it will be done.

Why? Because of us? No. It'll be done because there is something much bigger at stake here. And that's what I love about those words from the song we sang earlier. It will be accomplished. The work will be done. The church will progress. The church will grow, and it will ultimately

be a structure that brings glory to Christ. Why? Because God the father in eternity past promised the son that He would give Him a redeemed humanity, the church, in which to praise and glorify Him for all eternity. And that's why that songs says "for Christ will have the prize for which He died, an inheritance of nations." Folks, you and I are a part of a huge eternal plan and our responsibility before God is to fill our role in a massive army that is destined for victory.

Let's pray together. Our father, we thank You for this very clear directive that we have from our Lord. Father, we acknowledge that this is the church of Jesus Christ, that this is His church, that He is the chief shepherd, and that we are all part of the flock, that even those of us who serve as shepherds are under-shepherds to the chief shepherd. And Father, we want so much for this church to reflect Your directive, Your command, that we would march according to the marching orders that You have given us. Father, I pray that You would continue to raise up leaders in this church. That your Son would appoint the leadership that He wants. Father, I pray that as a result of that, the leaders would equip the people. Lord, give us wisdom and give us lives that are examples of what we teach. Help us to be diligent, teach the Word of God, to live the Word of God, and to pray that the Word of God would find its way into the heart of lives of the people that we minister to. And Father, I pray for the members of this church, Lord help each person here, and help each person who associates with this flock in this place to understand their part in the army, in the mission. Father, I pray that some even here tonight would be challenged to stop merely attending and to begin being actively involved in the work of serving. And Father I pray, that as a result, You would cause the growth of the body. The building up of itself in love for the glory of its head, Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Lord, we rejoice that the church will march ahead. That in spite of the trials all around, and in spite of the difficulties and troubles that the church may face, and in spite of the culture and the times in which we live and the hostility that is often mounted against the church, that He will build His church, because He will have the prize for which He died, an inheritance of nations. Lord thank You that we're part of a winning

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