

What Are We Doing Here?

Part I



Qualifications

Introduction

What are we doing here? Not in the deep, philosophical sense. Why are you sitting in those chairs? Why am I up here? Why does Jordan play those songs that way? Why do Rebecca, Bryan, and Nick do what they do? Why does Jess have the kids doing what they are doing? Why do we meet where we do? What are we? Christians. At least we call ourselves that. What does that mean? What are we supposed to be doing here and in our community? And why?

I like questions. Questions are great. They cause you to re-evaluate. They test your intentions and your resolve. They find problems and lead to solutions. (Tech support, CDs stacked.) We tend to be afraid of questions in the church. No need. Honest questions, honest doubt, even honest skepticism looking for honest answers, are where growth and maintaining of truth come from. When Jesus was asked questions, He asked questions right back. Jewish way of dialogue.

Questions are a great beginning point. Just have to be careful where they lead. Questions like what is church, what is a Christian, were the root of what is now known as the emerging church. Hang on before you assume a ninja defensive posture. A social reference to the church that was emerging vs. actual group called Emergent. Emerging from what? What one might call the “seeker” or “consumer” church movement. Why were they leaving/emerging and trying to figure out what many of us might take for granted as the basics of the faith?

Quote conversation from Radical Together (p. 51-52) by David Platt. [slide 2]

I was sitting at a table with an old friend who leads a large and thriving church. “We try to make everything easy for the members of our church,” he said to me. “We encourage them to get to know people in our community, whether in their neighborhood or office or anywhere else. Then all they have to do is invite those people to church. At church, those people will hear relevant, gifted communicators in a warm, attractive, and appealing environment where their children can be a part of top-of-the-line programs.” He concluded, “If our members will just invite their friends to the environment we create, then we can take care of the rest.”

Then he asked me what we do at Brook Hills. Hesitantly I said, “We actually do the exact opposite.” “Oh really,” he said. “What do you mean?” “Well, when we gather as the church, our main focus is on the church. In other words, we organize our worship environment around believers, not unbelievers.”

He looked confused. “Why would you do that?” he asked. “If your worship environment on Sunday is not appealing to non-Christians, then how is your church going to intentionally lead unbelievers in Birmingham to Christ?” “We’re going to equip our people every Sunday to lead unbelievers in Birmingham to Christ all week long,” I said. “Your members are going to lead them to Christ?” “That’s our plan.”

“Well,” he said, “once those unbelievers become believers, how are they going to grow in Christ?” “Our people are going to be equipped to show new believers how to live as followers of Christ,” I said. “I want people in the church to be able to fulfill the purpose for which they were created without being dependent on gifted preachers, nice buildings, and great programs to do it for them.” Looking puzzled, he said, “Well, that’s a new approach.” (me: I want this!)

In other words, is the church supposed to make disciples and be a disciple for you so you don’t have to do anything? Absolutely not. What happens when someone has been doing something for you for so long, and then suddenly you have to do it (like laundry)? You have to figure it out for yourself. Doesn't work when it comes to church and Jesus. This is where the emerging church came from and why the EC is pretty much heretical.

The questions remain. What are we doing here? How do we know we are doing it right? What does it mean to do it right? Earlier I alluded that questions like what is a Christian, what is the gospel, what is the church, which seem rather basic. If you were to be asked individually, would you feel confident that you would be able to answer them?

We are going to take a few weeks and talk about this stuff. I want to share with you why so that you know where this came from and where it’s going.

Describe reading Vintage Jesus [slide 3], appendix, our view of membership, what I’d like to see happen. “Commitment to fellowship,”?

Ingression

To be a member of something there are always qualifications. What does it take to be a member of a church, a part of the local body of Christ? You must be a Christian. What does that mean? That's important to know because that's where it all begins, so that's what we are going to talk about today.

Biblical Literacy

Ideation

Over the last 100 years there has been a marked decline in Biblical literacy in our culture. Decrease sped up after the 1960's. This has effected both the believer's and non-believers understanding of what the gospel is, means, and looks like.

Illustration

Musicals of the 40's and 50's, characters making references/comparisons to OT characters. Moses, Joseph, Abraham, Noah, Lot. These days you might have a hard time finding Christians who know who these people are. Why? Because the OT has been marginalized even in the church. This lack of foundation is why the gospel is up in the air. Becomes subjective.

Instruction

When Peter preached in **Acts 2** he was a Jew preaching to Jews about the Jewish Messiah from the Jewish scriptures. They had a common foundation, no need to build one.

When Paul went out he went to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. When he got to Athens and shared on Philosophers Hill, he didn't refer to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. He had to start from a common foundation and build it to Jesus.

Walk through **Acts 17:22-34** [slide 4] highlighting Paul's references and methods.

Interconnection

Our culture needs this kind of explanation and understanding of the gospel. What might that look like?

The Story

Ideation

People already have a set of beliefs, even if they can't articulate them. They have a concept of where they came from, what they are doing here, and where they are going. We need to help them identify, in general terms, what they already believe and show what the whole of the gospel looks like in contrast. This is what Paul did.

Instruction

Acts 17:22-23 We live in a very a-spiritual culture, which in itself is a form of spirituality. General names would be materialism or humanism. What we can observe and measure is all that there is. How we deal with that is up to the individual most part. **The god we worship is the material order, specifically self** [slide 5].

Acts 17:24-25 When we look at nature, when the materialist studies the material world from the subatomic to the galactic, we can't help but see design. We even use that word. We even give the designer a name, be it Mother Nature or just Nature. **We say that a non-intelligent, random process has been in motion for billions of years constantly ordering and creating designed forms and functions** [slide 6]. That takes faith to believe. If there is a

design there must be a Designer. If there is a creation there must be a Creator. He must be above us, greater than us. He must be supernatural.

Acts 17:26-29 We are not the result of a cosmic accident, we are the result of forethought, intention, from a desire to love and be loved [slide 7]. **Genesis 1-2**. Life in the Garden, walking with God, experiencing relationship with those below and above (animals/children and the Lord) as the Lord experiences relationship with us below Him.

Genesis 3. There was only one “don’t,” everything else was “do.” There were consequences to doing the don’t. One of God’s greatest forms of punishment and discipline is to allow us to experience the consequences of our choices [slide 8]. Adam and Eve’s sin wasn’t simply breaking a rule. It was taking on the responsibility of deciding for themselves what was right and wrong instead of leaving that in God’s hands. That is sin, both as a noun and a verb.

We don’t sin and then become a sinner. We sin because we are sinners. The difference between one who plays/sings and one who is a player/singer. Takes discipline and effort to get good at it, but it’s also innate. Lady Gaga, born this way.

The consequence is separation. Sin separates. There is only one captain of the ship. Separation is both here and eternity. The consequences of us living life on our terms and not God’s are evidenced on the news, along with how our sin effected the rest of creation [slide 9]. It’s all a result of The Fall.

We are made in God’s image. God cares about His creation and those created in His image, so He promised to do something about it (**Genesis 3:15**). He promised to come in the form of a human and pay the price for sin that we could never pay [slide 10]. The rest of the Bible is about the history of God’s people and following the line to this promised seed of the woman. Prophecy and statistics.

Acts 17:30-31 Since we as individuals are sinners, we need to respond to this individually. Paul says we need to repent. What does that mean?

To repent, change the mind, relent. Theologically, it involves regret or sorrow, accompanied by a true change of heart toward God. [slide 11]

Not just sorry you got caught, sorry you even did it, and a genuine desire to be changed by God who is the only one who can do it. After all, He created you. Remember, we are not the result of a cosmic accident, we are the result of forethought, intention, from a desire to love and be loved. It’s not about making a deal with God. It’s about saying I’m guilty, but I hear you want to save me anyway, I’m yours [slide 12].

Who is the One we cry out to? Jesus. Since he is the one who is going to judge us, He is the only one who can save us. But He doesn’t just throw out the guilty verdict and let us walk. He takes the guilt upon Himself and pays the price for our sins, and for being a sinner. **2 Cor 5:21**. What gives Him the right? How do we know He can and will do this? The resurrection. His death takes away our sin. His resurrection gives us life [slide 13].

Interconnection

The results? To put it simply and bluntly, Jesus should make a radical difference in our lives, in our families, and in our community because of His love for us and our love for Him. Does He?

Imploration - Do you believe this?

We are His. He is in us. We are in Him. We are dead yet alive in Him. He is our Master, our Father, our Head. We are His servant, His son/daughter, His body. He is the message, we are His messengers. You are either married or you aren’t. Either way, you should know and it should be evident to others. Where are you in all of this, especially those raised in the church? Believing and living this are the qualifications for being a member of a church.

This is one way to explain the gospel. The point is, are we living it? More importantly, is it living through us? Is it driving us as a church? Is it connecting us to one another? What are we doing here? This is our topic.

¹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). The complete word study dictionary : New Testament (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.