THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY

**Overview Statement**

God’s grand agenda is the reconciliation and restoration of all things that were broken in the Fall. This agenda will not be completed until the return of Christ; however, until that time God has established the church as the primary instrument for the administration of that agenda on earth.

**Main Ideas:**

1. God loved ALL of His creation, called it good, and then reaffirmed His love with a covenant to ALL creation – including nature, individuals, and nations.
2. The redemption of ALL that was broken in the Fall has been completed by the shed blood of Christ, but restoration is an ongoing process that will be completed when Christ returns as King.
3. The church is God’s chosen, primary vehicle for the administration of this reconciliation and restoration of ALL things – until the return of Christ.
4. The end task of ALL leadership gifts in the Church is to equip believers for works of loving service.

**Outcomes:**

1. Now:
   1. To grasp and express the main ideas of the lesson in their own words.
   2. To plan and carry out one new step in their personal life as a response to this lesson through a practical act of loving service.
2. Beyond:
   1. To recognize which aspects of God’s cosmic agenda they are not currently advancing, repent, and commit to advance His whole agenda from what has been learned.
   2. To work as a leader to equip other believers for loving service participating in God’s agenda to reconcile and restore ALL things.

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Participant Outline

1. Introduction
2. Assumptions
   1. The World is Hopelessly Broken
   2. Our Best Wisdom Won’t Heal Us
   3. Healing Comes Through Faith and Obedience
   4. The Bible is God’s Revelation for our Healing
   5. We are hear for a purpose
3. God’s Concern for His Creation – Genesis 1
   1. He created
   2. He evaluated the goodness of His creation
   3. His final evaluation
4. God’s Covenant with ALL Life
   * 1. Noah and his family
     2. All of creation
5. God’s Concern for the Generations
   1. Noah
   2. Abraham
6. God’s Concern for the Nations

### ALL NATIONS of the earth will be blessed.

Gen 22:18

### Israel was to be a priest to the NATIONS.

Deut 4:5-8

### God’s promise to heal the LAND.

II Chron 7:14

### NATIONS will hasten to you because…

Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 55:3-5

### God’s compassion for a sinful NATION

Jonah 3:8-4:2

### Name reputation among the NATIONS

Ezek 20 & 36

### The Gospel will be preached to ALL NATIONS.

Luke 24:47

### Make disciples of ALL NATIONS.

Matt 28:19

### God accepts men from EVERY NATION.

Acts 10:34, 35

### THE NATIONS will walk by its light.

Rev 21:24

1. God’s Redemptive Purpose

### Colossians 1:15-20

B. Why did Jesus shed His blood?

1. The Church and God’s Redemptive Purpose

### Ephesians 1:22-23 CHURCH =

B. Ephesians 3:17b – 19 FULLNESS OF GOD =

* 1. Ephesians 4:11-13WORKS OF SERVICE **→** Unity +Maturity

MATURITY =

* 1. Ephesians 3:20Immeasurably more: All things – Our nations

1. God's Redemptive Purpose Through the Church
   1. Ephesians 3:9-10 Manifold Wisdom of God

(God’s Redemptive Purpose)

**THROUGH**

**THE**

**CHURCH**

1. How a Nation Is Discipled

CHURCH



1. Critical Beliefs of the Early Church

### God who loves those who love Him

### Merciful God who requires mercy

### Culture striped of ethnicity – nobleman and slave

### Men must love their wives as themselves

### Rejection of abortion and infanticide

### Love to believers and beyond – care for the sick.

1. Historical Reasons – Why not now?

### Reaction to social gospel / liberalism

### Ministry of physical needs as a means to an end

### Pessimistic eschatology – view of the future

### Unawareness of the Kingdom of God in the present

### Paternalism:

### Perspective of relative poverty of those being evangelized and discipled

### Weak of teaching of stewardship

### Institutional model of ministry not sustainable

1. Unintentional Sin of the Church

### Isaiah 58

Vs 4b “you cannot fast as you do today and express your voice to be heard on high.”

vs. 1-5 Unacceptable Worship

vs. 6-7 Acceptable Worship

vs. 8-9a Promise of Healing

vs. 9b-10a Acceptable Worship

vs. 10b-12 Promise of Healing

vs. 13 Acceptable Worship

vs. 14 Promise of Healing

### Irreducible Worship

* + 1. Jeremiah 22:15-16
    2. Micah 6:8

### Leviticus 4 and 5

4:13:21 Community Sin

4:22-26 Leadership Sin

4:27-31 Individual Sin

### Response to unintentional sin

* + 1. Awareness
    2. Offering / Repentance
    3. Atonement / Forgiveness
    4. Changed Behavior – Behavior that reflects God’s will

### Romans 12:1-2

* + 1. Therefore . . . be transformed . . .
    2. Transformation = changed behavior
    3. Behavior that reflects God’s will

1. Application – Personal and Corporate

### Personal

### Reflection

### Action Plan

### Commitment

### Corporate

### Reflection

### Action Plan

### Commitment

4. Share and Pray

# THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY

## Narrative

What is the role of the church in this world? What is God’s agenda for the church? We will see how God wants the church to demonstrate His love in this world.

***Basic Assumptions***

As we begin, we need to examine several assumptions. It’s important to understand where each other is coming from as we learn together. First, that we as a human race, ***we are hopelessly broken, and our best wisdom isn’t going to heal us.*** The Bible tells us so. As an example, in the last twenty years, hundreds of agencies have focused their energies on this small island nation of Haiti where nine million people live on this tiny island. Millions of dollars, perhaps even a billion dollars have been poured into this nation in terms of relief and development kinds of activities. And yet, we haven’t seen much healing. We are broken people. The best of efforts by broken people cannot bring healing – unless we do it with reliance on God and according to the biblical worldview.

Another assumption is that ***our healing comes through faith and obedience*** to how God has called us to live. A secular, logical mind thinks that if we just know how to fix it—if we apply our best wisdom and knowledge and our money and our technology—things are going to be healed. But God’s Word contradicts this way of thinking. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God says: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked way, then will I hear from heaven . . . and I will heal their land.” Healing will come when God supernaturally intervenes into our lives, into our society, into history; and He brings the healing. That doesn’t mean that God is not going to use us and our obedience to Him in His plan for healing. God uses His image that He has placed within us; but that image without God won’t provides the healing.

The next assumption is ***that the Bible is God’s revelation for our healing***. Think of the Bible as an owner’s manual. Every new appliance that we purchase comes with a manual that describes how to use the appliance, and it’s written by the manufacturer because the manufacturer knows how it was made and how it needs to be used in order to get the greatest use out of it. And God is our manufacturer. He made us, and He knows what we need to do to live well. We are to live the way that God calls us to live, seek God’s face, humble ourselves and think that it’s not our wisdom that heals us but that it’s God that heals us. It is as we seek His instructions for how we are to live and as we begin to put those instructions into practice, that our healing comes.

The last assumption is that ***we are created for a purpose***. We’re created to know God. We need to know who He is first of all. We’re created to be like Him. We’re created to manage the creation. How do we carry out this purpose? We serve. Our God is a servant God. We are to conform to His image as a servant, and unless we know Him, we’re not going to serve like He does. He commanded us to serve, and that’s what it means to manage God’s creation. We are agents of reconciliation to a broken world.

***God’s Concerns***

In order to serve as God serves, we need to be concerned with what concerns Him. We tend to think His concerns are primarily spiritual issues, such as redemptions of mankind. Is that so? The Book of Genesis reveals much bigger picture. Chapter one reveals that God took care to evaluate and made sure that His creation was “very good” (1:31). He evaluated the goodness of what He created. He made covenant with all life, not just with Noah and his families or with mankind (9:9-17). God is concerned for the future generations (6:18, 17:2-8). And throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, God’s concern not just for the nation of Israel but for all nations is repeated. In fact, the word “nations” is listed more than 2,000 times in the Scripture (Genesis 22:18, Deuteronomy 4:5-8, 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 2:8, Isaiah55:3-5, Jonah 3:8-4:2, Ezekiel 20 & 36, Luke 24:47, Matthew 28:19, Acts 10:34-35, and Revelation 21:24 to mention a few.) God is indeed concerned not just for our souls, but for all creation including all nations.

Many of us are used to hearing Jesus died to save us. If God is concerned for all creation, could it mean that Jesus’ death on the cross was for more than our souls as well? “[Christ] is the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;all things were created by him and for him” (Colossians 1:15-16, emphasis added). Why did Jesus shed His blood? “And through him to reconcile all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians: 17-20). Jesus’ blood was shed for the redemption of all that was broken in the fall.

***The Church and God’s Redemptive Purpose***

We have learned God’s concern for all creation and Jesus’ sacrificial death to redeem all things. Then, where does church fit in? “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.” (Ephesians 1:22-23, emphasis added.) What? God appointed Christ to be head over everything for the church? What does that mean? Why would God have placed everything under Christ for the church, “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Paul is saying here that the church is Christ’s body, and the church has the potential of expressing the fullness of Christ. It doesn’t always express the fullness of Christ, but it has the potential. We’re beginning to understand what it means that God placed all things under Christ for the church. And we are yet to see that happen.

Let’s look in Ephesians 3:17 with attention to the word “love”; “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love. . . And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

What Paul is saying is that the fullness of God and Christ is love. If we want to find the irreducible minimum of what the fullness of God, the fullness of Christ, is love. It’s love that is high, deep, wide, long. It’s this huge love which includes this huge agenda of God’s love for all that He created. Love is the fullness of God. And the church has the potential of expressing this fullness because the church is the body of Christ. We will see how this is possible in Ephesians 4.

Now let’s read Ephesians 4:11; “It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” All the church leaders are listed here: evangelists, prophets, pastors, teachers. What are these positions for? “To prepare God’s people for works of service.” That’s the ultimate purpose. We are created for a purpose—to serve. The ultimate purpose of the people of God, for the body of Christ, is to serve. We express the fullness of Christ through loving service. Verses 12-13; “So that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” God reveals to us here that unity in the body of Christ comes more from coming together to demonstrate His love through works of service, than it does from trying to agree on doctrinal fine points. When we begin to work together in spite of and regardless of differences, we can talk as people who have a common purpose. It’s as we do the works of service that God has called us to do that unity comes and that we express this fullness of Christ which is love. And Ephesians 3:10 says, in a paraphrase, “It is now, through the church, that God has chosen to express his manifold wisdom to the principalities and powers in heavenly places.”

The following story illustrates those verses. Imagine a soccer stadium full of people watching a game that is being played on the field. The stands are packed with observers. These represent the principalities and powers in heavenly places. On the field there are two teams. There’s the kingdom of darkness and the church. Each has a coach. The kingdom of darkness’ coach is Satan. The kingdom of light’s, or the church’s, coach is Jesus Christ. And Jesus, God’s son, has strategic game plans that He wants that team to implement. And as they obey their coach, they win the eternal cup. Not the world cup. This is a much bigger cup than the world cup. This is the eternal cup. It’s only as the church follows the game plan, the plays that its coach has called into play, that goals are scored and the game is won. If we read further in Scripture, we see that the principalities and powers in heavenly places are not the good guys. They’re not the angels in heaven—they are Satan’s minions. And God wants to demonstrate, to Satan and all of the powers of the kingdom of darkness, that he is going to redeem all brokenness through his multifaceted plan. It’s not just a one-dimensional plan for spiritual salvation, but the plan is multi-dimensional. It’s an agenda which includes restoration of all that was broken in the Fall. And it’s as the church obeys Christ’s instructions for how we are to live in the world that we see the grand purpose of God, the redemption of all that was broken, being fulfilled.

***So Many Churches, So Little Transformation***

There are periods in history where God has truly used the church to transform society. One of the most dramatic examples is examined in the book called The Rise of Christianity, by social scientist Rodney Stark. Stark wants to know what caused the radical change of the Roman Empire from a pagan empire into a Christian empire, which is the greatest social change that has ever occurred in Western history in the last 2000 years. He asks how a tiny group of 120 persecuted, rejected, oppressed and reviled people in Acts chapter 1 verse 14 were able to transform a powerful Roman Empire within 300 years. He discovered a system of beliefs that brought a whole new vision of humanity. He believes these beliefs are at the foundation of this radical social change.

1. For the first time in the pagan world, here was a God who loved those who loved him. In pagan Romanism, the gods certainly did not love the people who worshipped them. Even the gods fight each other, and they are not concerned about the people who worshipped them. But here was a God for the first time in human history who actually loved those who loved him. And not only that, He required that those who loved Him, love others.
2. The second critical belief was that here was a merciful God that requires mercy. This was, again, contrary to Roman paganism. Rome was well-known for its cruelty. Stark gives us an illustration of an emperor who had gladiators come into the coliseum and kill each other in a fight so that his son could experience the shedding of blood to the death as a celebration of his coming into manhood. Roman writers ridiculed Christians because they were merciful, especially to the poor. This was a joke among many of the early Roman writers. Why would you care about the poor? But this was one of the central beliefs of this new religion.
3. Another critical belief was that, culture should be stripped of its ethnicity and class segregation. Again, the Romans found this idea crazy, a joke and totally absurd. In a Christian worship service, a nobleman and a slave who come together to worship God as brothers. How ridiculous! Why would a nobleman allow a slave to call him brother? And the nobleman calls his slave brother! This was a whole new vision of humanity.
4. Another insane idea was that men were supposed to love their wives as they loved themselves. Everybody knows that men are better than women! Roman men owned their wives and their children. Stark said that Roman men could actually kill their children without legal consequences because the children were their property, and they could do anything they wanted with their property. But in this new religion, you were to love your wife and children as you loved yourself.
5. This group of Christians also rejected the practice and acceptance of abortion and infanticide. Stark quotes a letter from a Roman soldier who had been recently married and was on the battlefront. And he was writing home to his wife and he said, “Darling, I miss you so much. I’m so glad you’re pregnant.” He said, “If it’s a boy, take care of it and nurture it. If it’s a girl, set it outside and let it die. Love, Your Husband.” That was typical. But in this new religion, all of life—whether it was handicapped, whether it was an unborn baby, whether it was a girl or a boy, whether it was a slave or a nobleman—all of life was sacred.
6. The last example Stark gives is how these Christians loved people whether they were Christian or not, especially during times of sickness. Living in Rome was not what we might have imagined it would be.

Christians stressed love and charity as central duties of faith. In times of epidemics, what difference would there be if Christians showed mercy and charity? Surprisingly, people’s chances for survival improved greatly with minimal care, which Christians provided. Roman pagan doctors had no reason to serve the sick and often fled infected cities. Pagans who could not flee often took sick people outside and left them on the street, afraid of contamination. Christians not only cared for their own, but for others. The result was profound. Many people saw the new view of humanity that came from the Christian faith and converted to Christianity. In 40 AD, there were only 1,000 believers which was only .0017% of the 60 million people. Stark estimates that by 300 AD there were 6 million Christians in the Empire, which was 10.5 percent of the total population. Constantine had legalized Christianity and paved the way for it to become the state religion in 381 AD. Although Christians were only 10.5 percent of the population as that century opened, we see transformation of a whole society and culture.

There are similar instances of great social impact in church history. Societies in Europe, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland were transformed during the Reformation. And remarkable social transformation occurred when a biblical worldview came to England. Laws against slave trade and slavery eventually passed, influenced by William Wilberforce, a growing consensus in Parliament, the Wesleyan Revival, and a growing groundswell of the Body of Christ. People in the society were putting their faith into practice in new ways.

***Why Not Today***

We rejoice about the church's impact on history, but we have to ask why the church of today is not making such a large impact on its culture. For example, 40 percent of Guatemalans claim to be evangelical believers; yet, Guatemala has been a corrupt and impoverished society. What’s wrong? In Rwanda, 80 percent claimed to have been Christians before the genocide. This is true all over the world. Shouldn’t we see dramatic social change? In Rome, only 10.5 percent of the population changed an empire. Something’s wrong. Could it be, the church of today does not impact society because it is focused primarily on one part of God’s agenda? Does the church of today need to be awakened to all aspects of God’s manifold agenda?

It is important to understand why much of the conservative church of the past 150 years has not focused on God’s whole agenda. In the 1850s, there was a theological movement in Europe called higher criticism, which produced a doctrine known as the social gospel. One tenet was that the Kingdom of God comes on earth as the church does works of service. The other was universalism—all people are saved, regardless of their response to the Gospel. These tenets were heresy to the conservative church, which believes that each person must be born again.

In reaction, the conservative branch of the church trained pastors and missionaries almost exclusively in evangelism and spiritual conversion ignoring the other aspects of God’s full agenda. These missionaries then discipled new generations with a focus that does not include God’s whole agenda. Still today, many groups of believers around the world have the same narrow view of the Gospel. We thank God for the missionaries, their dedication, and great work—but they did not know that part of God’s plan includes using the church to transform societies.

The conservative branch of the church was also influenced by a theology called dispensationalism. Developed in the 1840s, dispensationalism taught that the world will only get worse until Jesus returns, and it often treated the Kingdom of God as future only—after Christ’s return. When the church believed that the Kingdom of God is only for the future and that there is nothing that can be done to heal the world, it had no reason to influence society. That’s not a biblical perspective. Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is among you.” It’s both present and future. What did Jesus teach us to pray—“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”? Did He mean for that only after His second return? Of course not! God is concerned for His will to be done on earth now as it is in heaven. And as God’s will is done on earth now, the Kingdom comes.

Sometimes, when physical or social projects were done by the conservative church, they were considered primarily a means of evangelism. The church needs to remember that Jesus expressed His love and compassion to all men and women, regardless of their response to Him. He healed ten lepers, though He knew nine would not respond.

Every generation since Jesus was on this earth has believed that they’re in the generation in which Jesus would return. It is not a bad perspective; we need to live as though Christ is coming back tomorrow, next week, or next year. But he may not come for another ten years. One hundred years. One thousand years. And if He’s not coming back for that length of time, what does He want to find us busy doing? Occupied until He returns! And no man knows the day or the hour when the Son of Man is going to return. Only the Father does.

There were other problems. Historically, paternalism has discouraged the church in the Two-Thirds World from wholistic vision. Many Western missionaries had a scientific background and enlightenment worldview, and brought technology and money intending to help bring material and social healing in developing countries. Many of the physical or social efforts carried out by outside agencies were built on a belief that local people were unable to help themselves, and well-intended development efforts actually created dependency and reinforced a mentality of poverty and fatalism. People who have material resources have a responsibility to help others—but must continually encourage those in need to discover and use the potential and resources God has given them. People of developing nations need to know that God has placed in them the same intelligence, abilities, creativity, and reflection of His image as He has given to people of materially developed nations.

***Unintentional Sin***

It is important to understand that this imbalance did not start in modern times. We see it in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 58 God is shouting for Israel’s attention, to correct their misunderstanding of His big agenda. It is clear in the first four verses of Isaiah 58 that the Israelites thought they were worshiping God as He wanted. It is equally clear that, from God’s perspective, they were not.

In Isaiah 58:3 the people ask God, “Why have we fasted . . . and you have not seen it?” They think they will obtain God’s approval and blessing by the act of fasting and self-denial. Their question reveals their motivation. When they see no sign of God’s blessing, they complain. God replies firmly: "You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high." God is not pleased by religious acts of humility carried out by those who do not treat others with compassion and justice. He called for repentance.

In three narrative couplets, God explains the kind of worship He wants and states the results of appropriate worship. In the first couplet, God tells Israel that true worship includes ministering to the physical and social brokenness of the powerless (verses 6 and 7)—then promises to heal Israel’s own brokenness as the people obey (verses 8 and 9a). In the second couplet, God tells Israel that true worship includes the cessation of malicious division among His people and reaffirms the need to care for the powerless (verses 9b and 10a)—then promises healing in one of the most beautiful word-pictures in all of Scripture (verses 10b through 12). In the third couplet, God affirms the practice of spiritual Sabbath activities (verse 13a), but not in the absence of demonstrating love. Those who honor the Sabbath do not go their own way and do not speak "idle words" against other people (verse 13b). God then promises them joy, restoration, and inheritance (verse 14).

Isaiah 58 gives a new view of spiritual worship. It is not an outward expression of duty and laws, but an inner attitude of the heart, serving God and others. It seems clear from the Isaiah 58 text that Israel’s sin of inappropriate, incomplete worship was unintentional. Still, Israel was culpable, guilty before God. In the following chapter, Isaiah 59, God calls Israel to turn from its wicked ways, repent, and be restored to the blessings He intended.

Much of today’s conservative, evangelical church also needs to repent of inappropriate worship. We have understood only part of God’s agenda—the spiritual. We have not adequately represented God’s whole concerns. Each of us and our local congregations must repent and respond with greater humility, prayer, and focus to the physical and social brokenness of our communities. When we hear and obey God, there will be healing. There will be transformation.

May we, the church, see our role in God’s big agenda! May we humble ourselves, repent, and serve! May God heal and restore our lands! May His Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven!

*By Bob Moffitt, Harvest Foundation*

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**Suggested Resources:**

Miller, Darrow L. and Bob Moffitt. *On Earth As It Is in Heaven.* DVD: Session 2. Available through Disciple Nations Alliance: [www.disciplenations.org/resources](http://www.disciplenations.org/resources).

Disciple Nations Alliance. [www.disciplenations.org/resources/course](http://www.disciplenations.org/resources/course). Sections: Wholistic Ministry

Harvest Foundation. [www.harvestfoundation.org](http://www.harvestfoundation.org). Sections: Stories

Moffitt, Bob, Tesch, Karla. *If Jesus Were Mayor: How Your Local Church Can Transform Your Community.* Oxford, UK: Monarch Books, 2006, pp. 87-97.

Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity.* San Francisco CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997.