

GRAY MATTERS

The Four Pillars of the Church - Part One

Matthew tells us in 16:16 that God has built his Church on the rock of Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Paul said, in Ephesians 2:20 that it is "built on the foundation on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Chief Cornerstone." And he goes on to explain in chapter 4:11-12: "It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service* (Italics mine), so that the body of Christ may be built up."

From these Scriptures, we know that our lives together are built upon Jesus himself; the Cornerstone, who holds all things together, and it functions by those with the above mentioned gifts, discipling the whole church to participate in God's mission to the world. No one is left out and told to just sit back and do their own thing because they only have to show up every once in a while, to get their spiritual tank filled.

Along with the foundations already mentioned, the church has adopted some basic biblical practices, or pillars, which are built upon the foundation to hold up and support the life of the church: Worship, Mission,

Fellowship, and Discipleship. The whole life of the church revolves around these four indispensable and non-negotiable pillars, or practices, in how we relate to one another and to the world.

I have come to realize that the church, as a whole, may have rearranged these pillars in such a way as to support our comfort, over God's mission. For the early church, and for all the spiritual revivals throughout history that we know about, Mission was always the first functional pillar, upon which our Worship, Fellowship, and Discipleship were aligned and lived out.

God had sent His Son into the world to accomplish the Mission of God – the redemption of the world. Jesus enlisted the 12, the 70, and the 120, to continue this mission. And his parting words to his disciples were for all his disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations...” This is the foundational Mission of God, upon which all of the other pillars line up.

Unfortunately, the order has gotten rearranged, beginning in the 4th century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and the ranks of the earthly church began to swell with forced conversions and ritualistic adherence without people necessarily having a true repentance and change of heart. We call this Christendom – a force that has ruled the western world for almost 2000 years.

In Christendom, since everyone was expected to accept and practice a form of Christianity, the pillar of Mission was no longer the guide by which all other pillars were aligned. It was replaced by the pillar of worship. And everything began to revolve around Worship: Mission, Fellowship, and Discipleship came out of Worship instead of Worship, Fellowship, and Discipleship coming out of Mission – the Mission of God to the world.

A lot of teachings and books have been calling the church back to being Missional. Basically, this means replacing the original pillar of Mission in its rightful place as the pillar upon which all the other pillars align, in order to faithfully fulfill our place in God's Mission to the world. I'll say more about this in my next "Gray Matters."