

This is Reality: Theological.

Intro:

- A new mini-series called ***This is Reality: Theological. Missional. Relational***
- An attempt to explain why we approach things the way we do as a church

When we are seeking to understand who we are as the church and what we should be doing, we can measure an idea through this paradigm: **Theological. Missional. Relational.**

- For example, when we are wondering about doing a certain ministry or outreach or program, we need to consider:
 - What do we care about?
 - We care about Theology: We want to be biblical and consonant with the character of God
 - We care about Mission: We want to be proclaiming and demonstrating the Gospel in all we do
 - We care about Relationships: We want to make sure that we are caring for and loving people

We will take 3 Sundays to identify, very simply, how these 3 concepts: **Theology, Mission and Relationships** shape and inform **who we are and what we do** as a church/family of churches

Theology:

- Reality is Theological
 - Theology is the study of the nature of God
 - To say something is theological is to say that it is related to the study of theology (God)

When we say that **the Church is Theological**

- We are saying that the church bases its identity and activity on an understanding of who God is
- We are saying there is something (theology)/someone (God) that transcends time, place and culture and creates, sustains, empowers and leads the Church in every generation
- Beyond style, fads, programs, techniques

To say we are based on theology is to say we are not based on any other ____ology

- Anthropology (the study of man)
- Sociology (the study of human society)
 - We do interact with those things and give attention to them, **but in order to** bring the Gospel to bear on humanity and society
 - But we do not base what we do on the wants/needs of people and culture
 - We do seek to communicate and live out theology in a way that communicates to whatever culture/sociological setting we find ourselves in

Because the Church is universal, and in innumerable cultures and societies, **local churches** may look lots of ways stylistically and contextually, but:

- If a church is going to be theological, it needs to be the following things:
 1. Centered
 2. Learning
 3. Praying
 4. Worshipping

What I want to do is explain how these theological directives directly shape the things we do:

- Not because we feel a need to justify them, but rather help you to be informed about them (1st)

1. We are a centered people

The Tabernacle (picture), **Revelation 21:1-4**

- The beginning and the end
- We the Church, who live in between, are **a further fulfillment of the old** and **a foretaste of the ultimate** when all things are made new

- Because we find the original design of God for His gathered people was Him in the center, and the ultimate design of God for His gathered people is Him in the center—we as God's people place Him in the center
- We are a **centered people**—a people centered on and gathered around Jesus
 - Theocentric/Christocentric

When we say that Jesus is in the center, we are then also saying there are certain things that are not in the center (on center stage)

- People, mission, gifts, personalities, social issues, agendas, programs, etc
- These are part and they are important... but they are not paramount
 - Jesus is.

We try to put Jesus on center stage

- We do not just “do what we do” just because
- Because there are Christocentric reasons, it keeps us from being anthropocentric

We structure things to draw attention to Jesus

- Our tendency is to take center stage (before ourselves or others)

For example:

The reason we start with worship

- Draw everything to Jesus, lest we just focus on everything else
- If you realized that the musical praise and worship at the begging was theological and not merely pragmatic, you would be on time (not a buffer)

The reason we end with worship

- The goal is always that people go away thinking about and talking about Jesus

Layout of the worship space (Sanctuary)

- Pulpit placement, eucharist placement, elders not seated center-stage
- Communion present every week (**Do this in remembrance of Me...**)
- Candles with communion
 - At every turn trying to point toward Jesus (**We are theological**)

Homegroups

- Large and small gatherings (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20)
- Acts 5:42
And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

We always need to re-center

- But also, how we bring Jesus and the Gospel to bear on the problems and issues of our lives and culture

2. We are a learning people

- Not just a vague gathering—we teach/preach and we learn/respond
- To center around God we need an understanding of God
- Jesus modeled this
 - Matthew 4:23
*And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*
 - Matthew 11:28-30
*28 **Come to Me**, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*

29 Take My yoke upon you **and learn from Me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

- Jesus connects learning (about Him) with spiritual well-being)

Christian living depends upon Christian learning

- Duty follows doctrine
- Imperatives need indicatives

We cannot assume that all of our thoughts about God are right

- This is why we teach and preach
- This is why we teach and preach **the Bible!**
 - We learn about Jesus and get our concept of who God is from the Bible
 - **And we teach the Bible as the final and ultimate authority!**
- John 17:17 "**Sanctify them in truth; Thy word is truth**"
 - Jesus does not use the **adjectives** *alethenos* or *alethes* (**true**)
 - In other words He did not say "Your word is truth"
 - Rather Jesus used the **noun** *aletheia* (**truth**)
 - **God's word is not simply "true" it is "truth" itself**
 - "The difference is significant, for this statement encourages us to think of the Bible not simply as being "true" in the sense that it conforms to some higher standard of truth, but rather to think of the Bible as being itself the final standard of truth. The Bible is God's Word, and God's Word is the ultimate definition of what is true and what is not true: God's Word is itself *truth*."¹

A primary goal is to **learn, know and live** the Bible

- Children's church, youth group, home groups, camps/retreats, Sunday gatherings, etc.
- Podcasts, videos, CDs, DVDs, websites, social networks, radio, books

A criticism that could be (and often is) leveled here is: I

It is all about the person preaching and it becomes about one person

- That is not the case: The whole church has a responsibility to "**Hear what the Spirit says to the church**"
- Learning = listening

Whether or not we are learning (= growing) becomes a gauge by which we measure the success of all we do as a church

- This keeps us from self-centered **consumerism**
 - **The measuring rod is not:** Are my needs being met at this church or in this gathering, am I getting enough attention from the leaders, do I feel better about myself, are my gifts being used here?
- It is: Am I/are we constantly developing a better understanding of who Christ is?
 - And does this better understanding yield a greater love and obedience?
- The problem of **arrested development** in **Hebrews 5:12**

So the entire church body has a theological (God caused/centered) responsibility to be learning and teaching the Bible

- From the pews, to the web-designers, to the preachers

3. We are a praying people

- Turn to Revelation 5

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 83.

- This is why we pray—because being centered around Jesus, and learning about Jesus, we are moved to want to commune and communicate with Jesus.
- We are a people that are continually going to God

Theology (the Bible) tells us that God is present and listening—prayer is important

- From the Garden where God and Adam and Eve communicated to **Revelation 5:8** (and Luke 18:1)

This is why we have a **prayer team and prayer meetings**

We pray before the service, there are people praying during the service, we pray after the service

The fact that the prayer team is there communicates a belief in **certain theology**

- That God is present, caring, available and listening
- This is where information turns into application (Cf. homegroups)

We schedule regular prayer (prayer meetings)

- Theologically driven more than need driven

We pray a certain way (Because the Bible tells us certain things)

- The approach in prayer – Praise first (This is why we teach, it shows us that He is bigger than, more important than and more precious than, our own problems and lives)
 - Simply rehearsing our problems is not worshipping God, recalling His character in the midst of them is

We pray for people when they come to us for help with their problems

- Counseling
- What does this say we believe and what does it communicate about who we are?

4. We are a worshipping people

- We are exalting God—having assembled around Jesus, learned of Jesus, communicated with Jesus, we now exalt Jesus

What we mean by worship here...

- Revelation 5:9-14
 - Exodus 7:16
- “Let my people go, so they can worship me in the wilderness.”**

God never asks us to worship Him without giving us a reason to worship Him (Cf. learning)

- Psalmist would always say: **“You are worthy because...”**
- This is why we do **“The Second Set”** (The word of God prepares you for the worship God)

Responding

- The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13; Mk 4; Luke 8)
- Responding to the Word just taught (The enemy wants to take it away) = The Second Set
 - Communion/prayer available—time to reflect and respond personally in midst of gathering

We end the “worship service” with musical worship

- Music is the means of corporate expression, **but not the cause**
 - It is not the responsibility of the music or the band to draw you in
 - That is the responsibility of theology (We are theological)
- Not entertainment, it is relational theology (Theo. based on relationship)
 - Not for your approval, personal taste
- Participative
- Expressive

- "Reverent corporate worship then is not optional for the church of God... rather, it brings to expression the very being of the church. It manifests on earth **the reality of the heavenly assembly**."² (Grudem)
- **Freedom in worship (Cf. Exodus 7:16)—but not freedom to worship (You must worship)**
 - From Deut. (You shall worship) to heaven

Structure and Design

- Carpets (Cf. **Rev 5:8 and 14; 4:9-11 and Psalms**)
- Lights (Cf. **Rev 4:2-5^a**)
 - Not the cause—they represent the cause (the glory of God)
 - These elements are theological (not necessary though)

Song choice (Theological)

- Chosen to bolster the **teaching** (learning), inspire **prayer**, allow expressive **praise**, be **corporate**
- Theology works itself out behind the scenes

Repentance

- **Acts 3:19**
- Repentance so that we can enjoy God

Presence

- **Psalm 22:3**
- In worship something also happens to us—we ourselves are ministered to by God
- When we worship God He meets with us and refreshes us with His presence

Theology, an understanding of God, shapes and dictates who we are and what we do as the Church—God's people. May we do it all for God's glory!!!

² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1230.
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