



Introduction

In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren presents purposes, principles, and practices from the Scriptures to support his understanding of the church. This book is a mix of Business 101, Motivation 101, and Theology 101. Consequently, Warren offends those with a formal, liturgical approach to doing church because of his casual, meet-people-where-they-are view. He also offends those with a laissez-faire approach to doing church because of his business like methods. Warren additionally offends those who have a rigid approach to doing church because of his distinctions between form and function. However, many in the church today need to be awakened, because why you do what you do when you do it is not only important, it is critical to the proper functioning of the church. And since the seven last words of the church are, “We never did it that way before,” any voice that disturbs the assumed norm, particularly the norm of the *clergy*, is attacked.

Using words like *purposes, strategies, priorities, methods, efficiency, productivity, and tasks* takes me back to my business-school days. And using pithy statements and quotes that usually fall within the purview of motivational speakers, makes one at times feel as if involved in a TV infomercial. “I’ve done it. Now I will show you how to also be successful! Replicate and grow!” To his credit, however, Warren indicates this is not his intent; rather, he purposes that each church use what works for its individual, unique situation.

This book is well worth reading. It is motivational, instructional, and practical, provided you do not allow your prejudices to discard the baby with the bath water. Each local church must know its purpose and then move Earth to fulfill that purpose.

Concerns with Warren’s Position

In his work, Warren’s business and motivational style *does* force one to rethink the purpose and patterns of the church. However, concerns regarding the book are found in the theological aspects (the why)—the basis for the business aspects (the how) of the book. You must be certain the Bible supports your purposes and procedures.

Before providing specifics, the reader should be aware that any negative evaluation of Warren’s *Purpose Driven Church* will be considered an attack on the moving of Holy Spirit, because Warren states “never criticize any method that God is blessing” (p. 156).

Given that disclaimer, consider the following:

Warren’s support for his two types of services contains theological problems. The main issue is that he interchanges “church” and “services” in his discussions and therefore confuses the reader. That confusion is primarily the result of his understanding of four passages used to support his position.

However, before those passages are addressed, Warren makes a clear distinction in different purposes for different service types. He writes, “Most churches try to evangelize the lost and edify in the same service,” indicating that to try to accomplish two purposes in the same service leads to frustration (p. 245). That frustration affects both the leaders and the attendees. This is the reason Warren’s church has two different “worship” services—one to evangelize the unchurched and one to edify the believers. He also pleads that to mix two purposes into one service is to “create schizophrenic members,” not knowing when it is “safe to bring unchurched

*Gathering for
Edification or
Evangelism*

friends” (p. 301). Too many churches have for too long made that mistake: trying to accomplish multiple purposes at same time in one service. Here, Warren is on target! However, he once again confuses “church” with “services” and “worship services” with “unbelievers,” creating *schizophrenic* readers.

There are four passages he turns to in order (1) to counteract the claim that the church is *only* to go into the world to evangelize, not tell the world to come to church to evangelize; and (2) to support his understanding that when Jesus said “come to me,” we then should also tell the lost world to come to Him. In this case, “coming to Him,” for Warren, refers to attraction to the local church (p. 235). However, in three verses (Jn. 1:39; Matt. 11:28; Jn. 7:37) Warren uses, Christ is inviting individuals or groups to Himself—not to the local church. To confuse “coming to church” with “coming to Jesus” misapplies these passages. Additionally, Warren misapplies the parable of Luke 14:15–24 to church attendance when he indicates that God’s servants are to “compel *them* to come in, that my house many be filled.” However, particular passages, concerning the acceptance of God’s gracious invitation of salvation, are better understood in reference to coming to Christ and entering His kingdom, not to coming to a local church. “My house” should not be equated with the local church or the local church building. Warren’s concept of the local church is foreign to these texts. Consequently, he cannot support his view—telling the world to come to the church—as a “legitimate method of evangelism” (p. 234).

Additionally, Warren again misses the mark in 1 Corinthians 14:23, when he indicates that worship practices should be adjusted when unbelievers are present (p. 243). A correct understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:23–25 requires it be seen in light of the context of 1 Corinthians 12–14. Chapter 14 addresses the proper functioning of the body of Christ in light of the prior instructions to the body. In this context, Paul says that if one who is an unbeliever attends a meeting of the church, he will think you are mad if the gift of speaking in tongues is used improperly. Not that an activity is to be omitted or adjusted, but that that activity must be done properly. Therefore, this passage says nothing about special evangelistic meetings or even that a portion of each meeting is to be evangelistic. Rather, the proper functioning of the body of Christ is intrinsically evangelistic. Changes and adjustments are not required or expected, unless the activities are being done improperly.

Not only does Warren not support some of his principles and practices with proper biblical interpretation, but he seems cavalier with the use of Scripture to support his conclusions. For another example, in his comments on not needing a building in which to worship, he quotes Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I [Jesus] with them.” It is true that God is with believers when they meet together, since God via the Holy Spirit is already in each believer and therefore present, but it is erroneous to use a verse concerning the discipline process in the church to prove his view.

As a result, Warren cannot support his position of “come to and see” the local church from the Scriptures and he confuses the terminology of “church” and “services” to align with his pattern of “worship” based upon his misinterpretations. How is this problem resolved? Begin to define terms biblically, without confusion or overlap. The “church” is an assembly of believers who gather for edification. The church is to scatter in the world for ministry to the lost. That continues to be the primary way the world should be reached for Christ.

An assembly of primarily unchurched is *not* the church. It may be an evangelistic event sponsored by the church, but it is not the church. Warren has a “church service” on Wednesday evenings and “non-church services” on Saturday evenings and Sundays. Why confuse the reader and try to support inappropriate terminology from the Scriptures by calling a non-church activity “the church”? Call them what they are—two different forms of ministry—one evangelistic for unbelievers and one to edify the believer. As Warren is aware, this is nothing new, since early in the twentieth century, Sunday night services were started for evangelism (p. 246). The attraction was the new electric lights—a novelty—installed in church “buildings.”

Caution: These confusions and unsubstantiated biblical approaches may cause frustration in those who strive to replicate the Saddleback experience.

*Leadership of
the Church—
Elder or Elders*

Any book concerning the church, its purpose, and its practices should address church leadership. And for the church, multiple elders should be a central topic. However, Warren never addresses the topic of elders. Even in the passages that the early congregation at Saddleback studied to determine the church's purpose, the two central passages concerning eldership, in Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5, were not considered (pp. 96–97).

Since Saddleback is associated with the Southern Baptist Convention, one might assume that Warren, as the senior pastor, is in fact “the pastor.” He indicates that “the number one reason people choose a church is because they identify with *the* [my emphasis] pastor” (p. 175). And, “*The* [my emphasis] pastor of a church sets the tone and atmosphere of the congregation” (p. 212). Additionally, “*I* [my emphasis] added staff to assist *me* [my emphasis]” (p. 140). Historically, the Baptist leadership structure has been one elder who is *the* pastor or *the senior* pastor. He is the person in charge, and the personality of the church reflects the personality of *the* pastor. He stands each week in front of the congregation as *the* spiritual leader. The mantle is upon him.

When a book concerning the church does not address multiple eldership in the church, one must assume that biblical concept is not present and has not been considered. Since the local church is to be led by a number of men as elders, the omission of this concept is inexcusable. The church cannot function properly without the biblical structure of leadership.

Conclusion

Organizations, whether businesses or churches, have purpose(s) and methods of fulfilling their purpose(s). Each organization either grows or fails, depending upon how the purpose(s) is or is not accomplished. The obvious assumption is that each of the organizations correctly understands its purpose and the methodology to accomplish it. Warren's book provides excellent and practical principles and practices for accomplishing properly defined purposes.

However, for biblical views on reaching the lost and on multiple elders, consider the following in *LeaderQuest's* Articles:

Evangelism by the Church

Plurality of Elders: Change, but No Change

The Purpose Driven Church

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