

Why Being Fruitful is as Important as Being Faithful

In many corners of the church today, there's an unhelpful and unhealthy division between theology and practical ministry. This division is damaging to both the discipline of theology and the practice of ministry because one without the other causes an imbalance.

Part of the cause of this division is the large number of theologically-minded people who spurn *practicality* as *pragmatism*. This can be seen as an overreaction to the Church Growth Movement of the 1980s.

Such critics rigorously decried a methodological mania as devoid of theological foundation. They took aim at folks like Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, and John Maxwell, accusing them of having only a modicum of theology accompanied by mountains of methodology.

Unfortunately, those theologically-minded people concerned with too much practicality, strategy, and leadership, threw the baby out with the bath water. Rather than looking for the *proper* place of practicality, strategy, and leadership, they found *no* place for it.

There are theologically-minded people who are producing large bodies of literature attempting rebuff any emphasis on the practical. They are teaching a whole world of people—a whole generation of pastors—that practical ministry, leadership strategies, and coaching don't matter. I feel like some think practicality in any degree is heretical. It's ecclesiology that matters, they say. All that matters is theology, they say.

They are creating a division, where no necessary division exists.

Contrary to that line of thinking, you have to consider the *effectiveness* of your ministry as well. Effectiveness isn't only measured by the straightness of the angles in your division of the word of truth. Resist the urge to cluck your tongue when the topic turns to statistics and best practices, even if you just want to rush straight to ecclesiology and soteriology.

Honestly, it seems in some instances the "love" for theology is an excuse for failed discipleship, failed attendance growth, or failed discipleship, failed attendance growth, or failed outreach efforts. And, of course, that's not what they say—they say they are just being faithful. The problem is they are not working in such a way to also be fruitful.

Here's the danger. If we raise up a generation of theologically-minded people who have no tools for applying it to practical ministry, then reproduction stops. If we become so theological to the neglect of the practical, then ministry will be hindered.

That doesn't mean we embrace the practical to the neglect of the theological. It's also dangerous to go too far in the other direction. Practicality cannot be the driving force. Pragmatism cannot be the central focus of what we do. You have to be theologically-minded as well as practical.

Some essentially say, “I just want to do anything I can to reach people for Jesus.” That’s a bad idea. Don’t do anything you can to reach people for Jesus, because then you will end up losing the gospel.

The way we do ministry has to be driven by what we believe about the gospel and about theology. But if all we care about is theology and not how we might best apply theology in the world then we’re not taking seriously the gospel and theology.

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