

# THE CHURCH'S MISSION

SERIES: PBC DNA: WHY WE DO  
WHAT WE DO



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Various Verses  
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## *Various Verses*

In our current sermon series, we have been looking into the subject of PBC's DNA. We have been looking into the unique characteristics, the unique distinctives, that have made PBC into the wonderful congregation that it is. Yes, PBC shares the same essential beliefs, the same core doctrines, as most evangelical Christian churches. Our doctrinal statement is very similar to the doctrinal statements of many other churches. And yet, just as each person is different from every other person, so each congregation has its own distinguishing traits, its own special personality, setting it apart from all others.

There are of course many components to PBC's DNA; many components that make us unique (or, as some might argue, peculiar). However, at least for the current sermon series, we have chosen to focus on five. We have chosen to focus on five of the genetic traits that have been central to our identity as a congregation and that have been passed down from one generation of believers to the next during PBC's nearly 70-year history.

So far, Scott Grant and Paul Taylor have looked at four of these traits. Scott began by reminding us of the high value that PBC has always placed on expository teaching—of the importance of teaching through the Scriptures verse by verse. The following week, Paul led us through Ephesians 4:11-16, emphasizing the church as a body—a body in which each member is vitally important. Scott then talked about the New Covenant with its glorious truth that God himself has come to dwell within us. And last week, Paul addressed the subject of PBC's form of church leadership—a form of leadership based on the idea that leaders are servants and that leadership is shared.

Today, we will be looking at the fifth component of PBC's spiritual DNA; the fifth spiritual characteristic that has historically defined who we are as a congregation. Today, we will be looking at the subject of mission. We will be looking at PBC's long-held understanding of the Lord's mission for his church, looking at what the Lord is seeking to accomplish through his body.

This subject, the subject of the church's mission, is of course critical. If we fail to understand our mission, we will inevitably fail to accomplish that mission. In the worst-case scenario, we may even end up like the church of Sardis, about whom the Lord said, "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1). Thankfully, if we do understand the church's mission and do succeed in fulfilling it, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, then we will find ourselves living with the glorious hope of one day hearing the Lord declaring, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21).

## **You Are Not Your Own**

Historically, PBC's understanding of the church's mission includes the words carved in the front wall of the main auditorium: "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." These words from 1 Corinthians 6 might at first seem like a strange choice to place in such a prominent position, especially given the many other wonderful words from Scripture that could have been chosen. Also, given the larger context from which the words are taken—a context having mainly to do with sexual immorality—the words might seem to have little or nothing to do with the subject of the church's mission.

However, as the founders of PBC realized, these words embody a concept that is foundational both to Christian life in general and to the church's mission in particular. They embody a way of viewing ourselves—a way of seeing who we truly are—that should impact not only our sexual conduct but every area of life. Sadly, the Corinthians appear to have forgotten this concept. Sadly, too, the same can happen to us as well.

Let us read what Paul tells the Corinthians.

### **1 Corinthians 6:19-20:**

**Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;**

In these verses, Paul reminds the Corinthians of two things. First, he reminds them of the New Covenant. He reminds them that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). The mind-shattering reality is that God—the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving Creator of everything—has come to dwell within each person who has placed his or her faith in Jesus. The Lord himself has come to live within us. As a result, we need to realize that wherever we go, God goes with us. God goes with us when we help the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised, and regrettably he also goes with us when we commit sexual immorality and other sins.

And second, as the words on our wall declare, Paul reminds the Corinthians that their lives are no longer their own. They have been bought, purchased, redeemed by the blood of Christ. Consequently, they are now part of something bigger than themselves, or, more accurately, part of someone bigger than themselves. They are now part of the body of Christ. As Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 12, one person is a hand, another a foot, another an eye, and another an ear.

As followers of Jesus, our lives no longer exist to fulfill our own purposes. They exist to fulfill the purposes of the one to whom we belong and of whom we are now a part. Or, to put it somewhat differently, your life is no longer about you. My life is no longer about me. Rather, our lives are about Jesus seeking to accomplish his mission, his purposes, through his body, a body in which each member is a deeply loved and important part.

If we can grasp these two important ideas—that God has come to dwell within us and that we are now part of something bigger than ourselves—then hopefully we will begin to have a spiritual mindset, a spiritual outlook, that will allow us to understand the church’s mission. We will hopefully begin to see our mission and ourselves as the Lord truly intends us to.

And what exactly is our mission? What exactly is the Lord seeking to accomplish through his church, through his body? Over the decades, three main concepts have always been taught here at PBC; concepts associated with the words witness, ambassador, and discipler. The Lord’s mission for his church—the Lord’s purpose for his church—is to be a witness, to be an ambassador, and to be a discipler.

## A Witness

As we learned last year when we were studying the book of Acts, followers of Jesus are to be witnesses. Read what the Lord said shortly before he ascended to heaven:

**Acts 1:8:**

**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

The mission of the church is to be a witness for Jesus. Indeed, in a more profound sense, the church is not only to be a witness for Jesus but a witness of Jesus. The Lord himself has come to dwell within us and he is now seeking to make himself known through us. He is now seeking to reveal himself through his body—through his church—to reveal himself to a lost, broken, and hurting world that desperately needs him.

The reality is, Jesus is alive. He is alive within us, and our lives should bear witness of that miraculous truth. Our lives should be living evidence, living testimony, living proof of the reality of God. Yes, Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected 2000 years ago. And yet, the truth is, the resurrected Jesus now lives within each of his followers. Furthermore, his mission, his purpose, is to be embodied in all those who have placed their faith in him. Just as he did 2000 years ago, Jesus is still seeking to take on flesh today. He is still seeking to become incarnate today, and he becomes incarnate as his followers yield to him and depend on him.

The life of Jesus is of course characterized by love. As it says in 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” God’s essence, God’s nature, God’s character—what is more true about God than anything else—is conveyed to us by the word love. It is communicated to us by the Greek word *agape*—a word for love that is completely selfless and self-sacrificial. It is the kind of love that William Blake talks about in his poem *The Clod and the Pebble*, where he says,

*Love seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a Heaven in Hell’s despair.<sup>1</sup>*

It is also the kind of love that we see most fully and completely embodied on the cross—love that was willing to die for us, to die in our place.

It is this God, the God of self-sacrificial, *agape* love, who has come to dwell within his followers and whose mission is to make himself known through us. Simplistic as it may sound, the mission of the church is to make God, the God of love, known. Love is the mark of the Christian, as Francis Schaeffer observed in his pamphlet *The Mark of the Christian*.<sup>2</sup> It is the identifying characteristic whereby our lives bear witness of God. It is the means through which God genuinely makes himself known. As Jesus says, “By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have love [*agape*] for one another” (John 13:35).

In addition, as we read here in Acts, our witness is not dependent on our own strength and ability. We are not to love people through self-effort or self-will. Rather, we are to rely on the Holy Spirit and on his power. The Greek word for power, by the way, is *dunamis*, from which we get our English words dynamite, dynamic, and dynamo. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is to be a kind of loving inner dynamo, whereby we have the power to care about people; to selflessly love people, even when they may at times be difficult, abrasive, annoying, and even dangerous.

As we depend on the Holy Spirit and as our lives become more selfless and loving, our witness becomes more credible, more believable. As people see genuine changes taking place in our lives, it will hopefully grab their attention and hopefully cause them to ask questions about the transformation they see taking place in us.

This is one of the great joys for me working in the Recovery ministry—seeing lives that are being transformed and becoming more and more like Jesus. Sometimes the changes are fast and dramatic, sometimes they are slow and subtle. One way or the other, the Recovery ministry is always filled with a sense of the miraculous. It is always filled with a sense that miraculous changes are taking place and that the God of love is making himself known in incredible ways. Moreover, the God of love is continually using these transformed lives to draw others to himself. When people see alcoholics and addicts becoming sober, selfless, and genuinely loving, it causes them to desire those same changes to take place in own their lives.

## **An Ambassador**

Secondly, not only is the church’s mission to be a witness, the church’s mission is to be an ambassador.

(As Paul says in) **2 Corinthians 5:18-21:**

**All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Ambassadors are of course official representatives of a government. They are representatives who come in the power and authority of the one who sent them. Ultimately, their words are not their own. In fact, as Paul observes, it is as if the one who sent them is actually speaking through them. As ambassadors of Christ, God in effect is speaking through us, making his appeal through us.

As Ray Stedman said in his book *Authentic Christianity*,

*“The ministry of reconciliation is personally delivered... The good news does not come by means of angels. It is not announced from heaven by loud, impersonal voices. It doesn’t even come by poring over dusty volumes from the past. In each generation it is delivered by living, breathing men and women who speak from their own experience. Incarnation, the word become flesh, is forever God’s way of truly communicating with people.” (Authentic Christianity, 180).<sup>3</sup>*

And what message has the church been given to proclaim? What message has the King of kings and the Lord of lords given his ambassadors to make known? It is the message of reconciliation. It is the Good News that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” Through faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven—our moral debt is erased—and we enter into a living and vital relationship with the One who created us.

The Greek word for reconciliation is *katallasso*, which means ‘to exchange’ or ‘to trade’. When we come to believe in Jesus, an incredible exchange takes place, an incredible trade. When we come to believe in Jesus—come to believe in his death for our sins—our sins are miraculously exchanged or traded. As we place our faith

in Jesus, our sins, our trespasses, our failures, are taken from us and in exchange we receive his righteousness. In the sight of God, we become as righteous, pure, holy, and blameless as Jesus himself. It is the greatest exchange that has ever or will ever exist, and it is our amazing privilege and responsibility as his ambassadors to make that exchange known.

Jesus was talking about this message of reconciliation when he read from Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth. Let us read what Jesus said early in his ministry.

**Luke 4:18-19:**

**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the  
captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”**

These verses express the heart of Jesus' mission while he was on earth; a mission that culminates with a proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor. This is very likely a reference to the Year of Jubilee—the great celebration in Israel every 50 years when debts were forgiven, captives released, and property restored. It was a time of tremendous rejoicing. The Year of Jubilee, however, was also a picture. It was a spiritual picture, a spiritual metaphor, symbolizing the deeper forgiveness, release, and restoration that humanity needs. It pictured humanity's need for forgiveness of sins, the release from guilt, and the restoration of our relationship with God. Jesus began proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor while he was on earth, and he is still proclaiming it today through his church, through his ambassadors.

In reality, this world is the crossroads of eternity. Every person you and I will ever meet is an eternal being, and the central question being decided in this world is where each of those beings will spend eternity—with God or separated from God. The church—God's ambassador—has been stationed at the crossroads. We've been stationed at the crossroads of eternity with the message of reconciliation. We've been stationed at the crossroads with the Good News that can change the eternal destinies of men and women, taking them off the broad road and placing them onto the narrow road, taking them out of the kingdom of darkness and placing them into the kingdom of light.

## A Discipler

Along with being a witness and an ambassador, the church's mission is also to be a discipler. This is what Jesus commanded in The Great Commission. Read what Jesus declares in Matthew 28.

**Matthew 28:18-20:**

**And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

Down through the centuries, many wonderful sermons have been given on these verses. However, in connection with our current study, I want to focus on the idea of making disciples. I want to focus on the idea that making disciples is critical to the church's mission.

The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*, which simply means 'learner'. Yes, we are to be a witness of God's love and ambassadors proclaiming a message of reconciliation, but love and reconciliation are just the beginning. They are just the beginning of a whole new way of life. Being a follower of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus involves learning to walk as Jesus walked and to live as Jesus lived. As it says in 1 John 2:6, “Whoever claims to live in him [God] must walk as Jesus did.”

That is where discipleship comes in. Discipleship involves learning to walk as Jesus walked and to live as Jesus lived. It is the growth process whereby we increasingly become more like Jesus, increasingly become more Christ-like. Yes, we should long for people to come to know Jesus, long for them to be saved. But once they have been saved, we should long for them to grow and mature. We should long for them to become learners, to become disciples, observing all that the Lord has commanded.

As we discovered in our study of Acts, in the early church, baptism usually occurred soon after a person had professed his or her faith in Jesus. It occurred soon after a person was saved, and it was intended to be a first act of obedience, a first act of a disciple of the Lord. We are saved through faith, and baptism is a way of using our bodies to symbolically communicate the inner change, the spiritual change, that has taken place within us.

Although baptism is a first act of obedience, a first act of being a disciple of Jesus, it is a one-time occurrence. It takes place only once in a believer's life. Over the remainder of a believer's lifetime, he or she is seeking to observe all that Jesus has commanded, seeking to discover the truths that the Lord has revealed and then to put those truths into practice.

Here at PBC, we have always believed that the Bible is the source of divine instruction. We believe that the Bible is the source for learning what the Lord has commanded. It is the place we turn when we want to discover what God has declared to be true. Indeed, this was Jesus' prayer for his disciples when he interceded for them at the Last Supper, saying, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

As Scott Grant told us at the beginning of our series, expository teaching of the Bible has always been part of PBC's DNA. We teach the Bible verse by verse, line by line, precept upon precept because we believe that teaching the Bible is an absolutely essential part of making disciples, which in turn is an absolutely essential part of the church's mission. It is what Jesus commanded us to do. It is also why the word 'Bible' is included in our name—Peninsula Bible Church—highlighting our belief in the importance of the scriptures.

My prayer is that the Lord brings all of us to a deeper understanding of the church's mission. I pray that we will genuinely understand that our mission is to be the Lord's witnesses, ambassadors, and disciplers, filled and empowered by his Spirit. I pray too that our understanding won't be merely theological and theoretical—won't be merely informational. I pray that it will also be transformational, penetrating our hearts and our experience and moving us to be about our Father's business, our Father's mission, reaching out to a broken and hurting world that desperately needs him.

## EndNotes

- <sup>1</sup> William Blake, *The Clod and the Pebble*, In *The Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43655/the-clod-and-the-pebble>
- <sup>2</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian*, Pamphlet, <http://sam-xa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/The-Mark-of-the-Christian-by-Schaeffer.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> Ray C Stedman, *Authentic Christianity*, Discovery House, 1996.