

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Leadership 1-Ecclesiology
Week 2 - The Mission and Function of the Church

Introduction

“...traditionalism is a factor that shows one of the highest significant negative correlations with church growth.” (p. 14, Schwarz)

Discussion question: What are some traditional church structures than seem irrelevant?

Examples include getting dressed up to go to church, using the King James Version of the Bible etc. If you ask people why do they do these things, what type of response do you get? Answers like “I don’t know or this is the way we have always done things.”

“Traditionalism means church forms have to stay the same way I have become used to them.” (p.13-14, Schwarz)

Most of us disdain traditionalism, yet need to ask, “Are we traditionalists ourselves?” We tend to think of traditionalism as adherence to structures that are no longer relevant, and that is true. But if you or I support and participate in structures without knowing WHY we do them, or because our leaders tell us to, or Xenos does it this way, then we are traditionalists as well, even if the structures are fine.

There really is very little instruction given of the kinds of structures that should exist in the Church. How do we go about deciding what a church should look like?

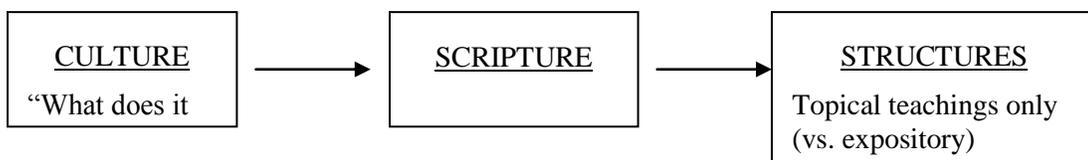
How do we create a structure for the local church?

Let’s review a methodology for determining the structures that a church will use:

In both of these cases, Berkoff’s and Ryrie’s approach, the starting points are *existing* models.

Is there anything wrong with this method? Yes – it is not starting with the Bible and pays no attention to culture.

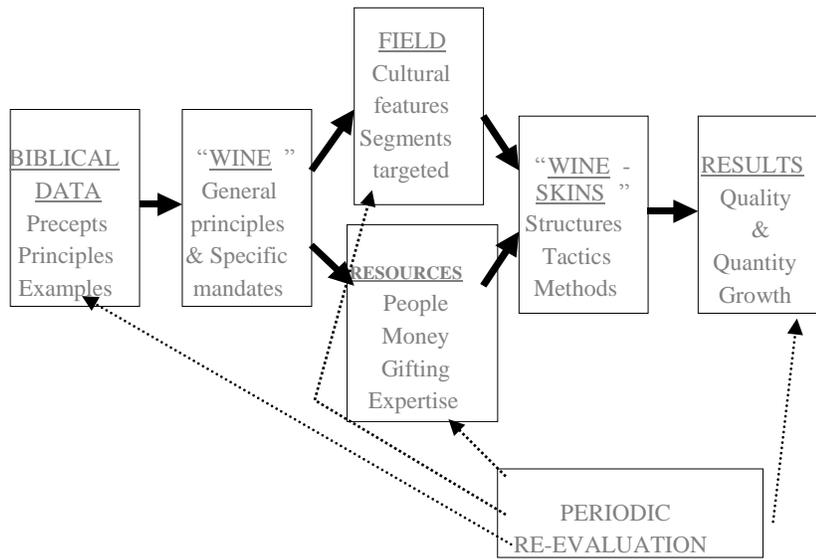
The opposite error should also be in view. Many of today’s mega churches focused on attracting seekers are vulnerable to starting with “what does the culture want” and catering to that, at the possible exclusion of key biblical principles that apply to church and body life.



2 antithesis: traditional, ignore culture, & use scripture only to substantiate what they already have. Newer mega-churches: starting point is what does the culture want and that sets the agenda for the structures – again, the Bible is not the starting point.

Only by setting aside all previous models and starting from the Bible alone in the context of the community and its culture can you arrive at a wineskin that fits the wine.

Let's look at another, better method.



Every local church has certain goals, and a strategy for accomplishing those goals. It also has structures and methods by which it carries out this strategy. How should we determine these things? Since we want to base such decisions on the Bible, it is vital that we approach the biblical data with sound interpretive principles. Unless we do this, we will build the church in ways that are ineffective, or perhaps even at cross-purposes with Christ.

"Biblical Data" consists of the material from Scripture that describes the essential nature and mission of the church. As argued earlier, this material includes material that is universally applicable (such as ethical principles), Jesus' specific teaching about the church, Acts, the epistles and Rev. 1-3. One of the primary considerations must be whether the scripture is describing precepts, principles, or examples. Each of these provides a different level of authority, application, and/or flexibility to today's church.

- **Principles refer to descriptive doctrinal statements about the nature of the church that have universal relevance** – regarding ecclesiology: what God says that the church is. These are usually indicative the church is the body of Christ (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12), proper motives to give (2 Cor. 8, 9), motives to evangelize & that we are ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). For example, the analogy of the local church as a physical body (Rom. 12:4, 5) describes certain features of church life (e.g. interdependent involvement and simultaneously diversity of gifting) which have important implications for church structure. These carry basically the same weight or authority as precepts.
- **Precepts refer to specific commands addressed to the *whole* church.** Therefore, these are imperatives. They define aspects of the church's mission and are applicable to all Christians in all ages. The Great Commission (Mt. 28:19), loving one another (John 13:34, 35), the exercise of church discipline (Mt. 18:15-17), and giving to those in need (Gal. 6:10) would be examples of such precepts (Titus 1:5 would be an example that applies ONLY to the Cretan church). Baptism & communion are also examples of precepts.
- **Examples** are just that: **specific ways that the New Testament church gave expression to scriptural precepts and principles.** Since cultures and church resources change, scriptural examples are not binding on us. However, in view of the tremendous fruit borne by the

New Testament church, it is wise to carefully consider one's reasons before deciding not to include them. House churches are an "example", not a command, yet they seem to have virtually universal relevance since home groups greatly facilitate *koinonia*. Therefore we want to be careful before discarding that structure because it is not commanded. On the contrary, the Jerusalem church's communal property seems to be an "example" which was not the norm even in New Testament times. An example may carry more weight when we see it recurring in the New Testament or an important principle behind it (as in the case of home groups supported by body-life principles and the command to "love one another").

"Wine" refers to what God's program is through the church. It is the distillation of the biblical data into the churches essential mission and nature. Jesus referred to this "wine" in his parable of the wine and the wineskins in Luke 5:36-38. The wine refers to the dynamic and expansive ministry of Christ and the Spirit, which He was initiating. Although our understanding of the biblical data describing God's program may grow and deepen over time, it is a body of truth that is unchanging and therefore serves as an anchor for our work in building the church. This area needs to be reviewed regularly as the church often overlooks key aspects of the wine (EG. *koinonia* & diversity of spiritual gifts/ priesthood of all believers). We will look at this in more detail in a few minutes and in the weeks to come.

"Field" refers to that segment of our culture that God has called us to reach for Christ (1 Cor. 9). It includes recognizing unique cultural features that may need to be considered in the design of the local body's structures. Especially in large churches there may be different sub-fields (EG. In Xenos – students and Urban Concern). The field will need to be continually re-evaluated since it is potentially in a constant state of flux.

"Resources" refers to such things as people, spiritual gifts, expertise, money, facilities, reputation, knowledge, time, etc. (EG. Students/empty-nesters/parents have different amounts of "free" time – which has structural implications such as how often you meet together; home groups need to balance time spent investing in non-Christians and equipping younger Christians). As with the "field", the church's resources are constantly changing and therefore need regular reassessing.

"Wineskins" refers to the present tactics of the church--especially the structures and methods employed to carry out that strategy. What should our attitude toward our structures be?

- **On the one hand, "skins" are very important because they deliver the wine.** Wineskins have the ability to enhance or inhibit the expression of the "wine." If structures are not available to facilitate key aspects of the Christian life, then the bible's teaching is simply a dead letter, the wine just spills on the ground. (read Wesley quote)

EG. There are massive amounts of biblical material on relationships within the church (whole chapters on the body of Christ as well as specific principles and commands for individual relationships on how to "love one another"). 1 Corinthians 12, Romans. 12, Ephesians 4 etc.

If we were only to teach about these in central meetings, but provide no home groups, how much of this material would actually be implemented?

EG. Eph. 4:11, 12 is a mandate to the church to equip the believers for the work of the church. If there are not structures that provide for personal discipleship, class work, and other forms of equipping, again, this command to the church would be a dead letter.

EG. Most of the "32 Strange Things about Xenos" are about structures, or skins.

EG. 2 Cor. 8, 9, etc. mandates giving financially to the church by each believer. Until we implemented structures such as the pledge program and Fiscal Support Team, we were failing in this important ministry.

Therefore, there is a burden on us as to why we should change a structure. We need to carefully assess *why* a change should be made before we make it (more shortly). It should not be carnally motivated (in response to the critique of what we do: D.L. Moody's response to critique of his evangelism methods was "I like the way I do it better than the way you don't do it").

- **On the other hand,** *"skins" are subordinate to the "wine" and derive their value from how well they deliver the "wine."* They have no intrinsic value and should be cast aside once they become non- or counter productive. We are resisting the tendency to be comfortable in our own traditions and habits regardless of their effectiveness.

The Need for Change

Thus, while the essential nature and mission of the church should remain constant, its outward appearance should be constantly changing. But human nature naturally resists change. There are many reasons for this fact, but it is a feature that tends to gradually render the local church ineffective. Since we naturally tend to become attached to the "skins," we often preserve them long after they have ceased to serve their purpose.

Because this process is very gradual, those involved often do not even realize that it is happening. But when this occurs, the local church ceases to be a dynamic movement and instead becomes a stagnant institution. Church history makes it clear that unfortunately this is the norm rather than the exception.

One of the crucial responsibilities of the leaders of the local church is to fight against this tendency. Leaders must lead the church into change as often and as extensively as is needed if they are to be faithful to the living Head of the church, Jesus Christ. EG. Luther took a beer drinking tune and wrote new words to it: "A Mighty Fortress"; he donned a black teacher's robe rather than the vestments required of priests (which were a powerful statement of authority). Today, we wouldn't think of doing either (song or black robe) because of what would be communicated to the culture we are trying to reach.

EG. In the early days of Xenos, we'd have no meeting on Sunday morning, driven mostly by our field (students wanting to sleep in and were anti-church). Our field has expanded to include career adults and families and Sunday morning has become an excellent time to reach them.

"Results" refers to the extent to which the church is accomplishing its mission. Both *quantitative* (more people coming to Christ) and *qualitative* (Christians becoming more mature spiritually) growth are important results.

Why do we take attendance? If God considers more people coming into the kingdom the mission of the church, why wouldn't we track attendance?

Why do we measure class completion, servant team size, discipleship relationships? These are quality indicators and we are committed to building the quality of the church OVER the quantity.

Matthew 28:18-20 – where is the quantity and quality (“...teaching them to observe...”) See how Luke carefully tracks both in **Acts 2:41-47** (quantity – “...day by day”; quality – description of communal life); **Acts 9:31; 16:5**.

Ultimately, a local church will wind up prioritizing one or the other, although still trying to hold to both. A local church has limited resources and will allocate them according to what they believe is most important. Most evangelical mega-churches emphasize quantity over quality (Rick Warren: “we want to get the crowd and then we’ll develop the core.”). Program based churches tend to emphasize quantity and then as the church grows, develop a core of committed believers. On the other hand we prioritize quality over quantity. We believe that if we do a good job building the core, God will bring us people, the quantity (see our vision paper).

"Periodic Re-evaluation" refers to the necessity of reflection and change in data, church tactics, structure and methods. As we evaluate the results of our work, and as we evaluate the ways in which our field and resources have changed, these factors will periodically necessitate the innovation of new "skins."

Church-wide, the elders and division coordinators go through this process through what we call “the planning cycle” – the quality and quantity of the church is evaluated. Home groups should do the same.

“Wine” part 1: Central Mission of the Church

Discussion question: **If you were to ask members of various churches “what is the *central* mission of the church?” what answers might you expect?**

To worship God in a corporate setting.

To provide me, the Christian, a situation where I can improve my life (health-club).

To demonstrate the love of Christ to the world through social and humanitarian aid and development (social gospel).

To christianize the United States of America (Christian right). Can you see how our discussion on when the church began can bear on this? A potential with Reformed theology that is covenantal will hold to Old Testament forms that would spin out in “God’s country – the USA”.

There is an element of validity in each of these models as we’ll see in the coming weeks. But, all are biblically inadequate when considered as the *central* mission of the church.

Key Passages

The New Testament states the church's mission in several different ways. By looking at various formulations, we can gain a sense of the purpose of the church in God's program and summarize at the end.

- **John 20:21** "Jesus therefore said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'"

Jesus calls attention to the nature of his own mission as a way of understanding the mission of the church. To be specific, we could look at Jesus' description of his intent in various places where he declared his own purpose:

Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

John 3:17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him."

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The church is to carry on Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost.

- **John 17:15-18,20-23** "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. 18 "As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 20 "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. 22 "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.

You can see that *community is essential to the effectiveness of the church* in reaching the world. That is focused on in John 13.

John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- **Matthew 28:18-20** "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, `All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

This passage contains Christ's so-called "great commission" to the church. We notice that reaching the millions of lost again figures prominently. The church is to GO, not to wait for others to come. International missionary outreach is explicitly mentioned.

Notice that baptism is included, as well as "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." In other words, part of the task of the church is to teach and disciple those we have reached with the gospel so that they have a healthy walk with God. This process is a natural part of a healthy evangelistic strategy, since those who have been discipled are in the best position to join in the task of reaching others.

- **2 Corinthians 5:15-20** "And He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf. . . Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

In this passage, Paul once again draws the parallel between the mission of Christ and that of the church. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. . ." and "he has committed to us the word of reconciliation." The church is to take up the work of reaching those alienated from God (which is the cornerstone of reconciliation).

However, our work doesn't stop there. We are to press the work of reconciliation forward in the area of bringing members close to God through enhancing their walk with him, teaching them how to worship him and how to gain victory over their own personal problems. Seen this way, reconciliation is both an event and a process.

- **Ephesians 4:11-16** "And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building

up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

In this passage, we again see Paul's vision of the properly functioning body of Christ.

Under the headship of Christ, not only are there leaders who equip other members (the saints) but the saints themselves do the "work of service." This work of service is the responsibility and opportunity of "every joint" and of "each individual part."

In other words, the vision here is of a community where everyone has a role in being built up spiritually and building up others. The result is growth. Qualitative growth, or spiritual maturity among the members (we are no longer to be children tossed here and there) as well as overall growth through reaching the lost (the growth of the body).

- **1 Peter 2:9-10** "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

In Peter's version of the commission of the church, the identity of the Christian community is stressed along with its mission. Its identity is that of the people of God. Its mission is to serve as a race of priest-kings who proclaim the excellencies of God. Some versions read "declare the praises of God" (NIV) which is not an accurate translation of the word *arete* ("virtues" or "excellencies").

Question: What problematic implications arise from the NIV's translation here?

Answer: The problem with this translation is that it implies that the church is merely commissioned to reflect the great things about God BACK TO HIM. Instead, it is both to God and to our fellow people that we are to proclaim or publish the great things about God. This proclamation is in harmony with the other passages stressing the importance of outreach, as well as the context (vs. 12) in which Peter urges that because of our mission we should keep our "behavior excellent among the Gentiles" so they will glorify God.

Summary: To reach lost people for Christ and bring them into a loving community where they can become mature disciples of Christ.

Therefore, the central mission of the Church is Evangelism & Discipleship in the context of Christian community.

The Christian community is essential to effectively reach lost people for Christ and essential to help them become mature disciples of Christ.

Now you know why we emphasize home groups in the manner we do. If we looked at one another's day-timers we would see our week including time we've spent in fellowship receiving the love of Christ, giving the love of Christ. We would see the time we have spent with younger Christians intentionally shepherding or discipling them. Perhaps our time includes others helping us the same way. And you would see time spent with non-Christians with the intention of building friendships that demonstrate the love of Christ, and verbally communicate the reasons for that faith.

Contra: Individualistic consumer culture where I am an “island” and everything comes to me. This is 180 degrees off from the biblical view of the church. I come to the church saying that I have the privilege of giving my life to God’s church (Col. 1:23,24).

The consumer culture wants to use God, where as the biblical community (and individual) is awed by the fact that he wants to use us!

Discussion Questions:

What are some of the negative results when local churches stray from this central mission?

Division, aberrations (EG. Experiential or doctrinal-focus on rapture); lose a primary motivation for maturity - therefore more vulnerable to materialism; children lose interest in God’s plan.

How does a local church stay on track with this central mission?

It is repetitious on what it does and why;

Cultivates this ethos by:

what we track (attendance [particularly home church] vs. membership; servant team size, classes, discipleship diads, baptisms).

what we celebrate (baptisms celebrate salvations and discipleship; church plants, deacons/Servant Team)

what we get upset about (we’ve communicated worry about outreach; discipleship lagging; planting; church discipline – unrighteous divorce, immorality, factious behavior, nominalism, Central Teaching attendance) and what we DON’T get upset about (one-time fall from grace versus a pattern).

Schwarz Materials (last week’s handout & assignment)

This reading described someone who has come to the same conclusions as we have, that emphasizes the wine or quality characteristics, over the wineskins. He also prioritizes quality over quantity. This was primarily a research project that confirmed what he was seeing in scripture – that quality will lead to quantity.

His barrel staves analogy provides us with a practical way to implement this material in the church or home church. By evaluating your weakest key quality factor and going to work on it, growth can result.

Discuss Schwarz’s analogy of barrel and staves. Do they think that his view of a weakness in one area limiting growth is accurate? His emphasis on God’s part was excellent – if we build a good barrel, he will continue to entrust more people to us. Can anyone think of examples either actual or possible? How could each one of the above areas limit growth?

His barrel stave on biblical knowledge was weak (passionate spirituality).

Like the traditional model, he is still starting from what “is” and then evaluating from there, rather than starting with the Bible.

#8 – Loving relationships – His manner of measuring is not relevant to most of us (although his understanding of it outside of meetings is excellent).

The “All by itself principle” read p. 20

“Wine” and “Wineskins” Workshop

The following areas of ministry are found to be necessary in a properly functioning Body, either by New Testament precept or example. Included under each area are the scriptures supporting or commanding the ministry, as well as the relevant people in our own church to whom the responsibility for the given ministry falls.

(Teachers: Break the class into groups and review the instructions)

Instructions

- **Read each passage and determine if it is precept, principle or example.**
- **Discuss and list the structures in Xenos (at large) and in your home church that facilitate this ministry.**
- **Also include the antithesis: “If this is NOT present in the home group, how is the home group affected?”**
- If time, also ask how to “categorize” the area - ***, **, or * and why]
 - *** = Absolutely Essential
 - ** = Important, but could be set aside in the developmental stages
 - * = Could be done without for a period of time
- **Have one person present your findings (3-4 minutes).** (They should focus entirely on the structural provisions in their presentation.)

[Teachers: judge how many of the following areas to do based on the time left in class.]

These are areas of formal ministry. In other words, the church provides for these things.

1. Evangelism ***

Scripture - 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Mt. 28:19-20

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Preaching Ministry - Central Meetings
Individual Evangelism (1 Pet. 3:16) - Everyone
Home Churches
Cell Groups

2. Bible Teaching ***

Scripture - Hebrews 5:12-14; Acts 2:42, 19:9, 20:18-21; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2, 3

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Central Meetings - Elders & Teachers
Retreats - Home Church Teachers
Personal Discipleship - Everyone
Home Church
Tape Ministry
Classes

Web site

3. Counseling * Formal, * Ad hoc (informal)**

Scripture - Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 12:8; Col. 3:16; Col. 1:28,29

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Pathological - Special Ministers, refer out to professionals

Marriage - Elders, Home Church Leaders

Family - Elders, Deacons, Special Ministers

General Emotional & Spiritual - Mature Believers

Paid Counselors

4. Leadership Training ***

Scripture - 2 Timothy 2:2; Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 3:14; Ephesians 4:12

Notes: Why do we rate this higher than formal church counseling? Mature believers will be the ones that help with the counseling. Some churches this would not be a priority.

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Classes including Challenge Groups, ministry specific training etc. - Elders

Ministry Houses - Various House Leaders

Cell Groups - Elders, Home Church Leaders

Personal Discipleship - Mature Believers

5. Discipline * (formal church discipline)**

Scripture - 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Matthew 18:15-17

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Elders, Deacons, Mature Believers

6. Caring for the Poor * (formal) * (ad hoc)**

Scripture - Galatians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 5:3-10; Matthew 25:3-46; Galatians 2:10; Acts 11:29

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Social Service Ministries - Social Ministers

Financial Relief - Whole Fellowship Giving

World Missions –

7. Prayer ***

Scripture - Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2-3; Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Cell Groups

Workers Meeting

Special Prayer Meetings

Home Churches

Prayer Net

8. Missions **

Scripture - Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 13:2-3; Matthew 24:14

We probably waited a little too long in this area. Mid-80s before we started to get into missions. Financial support and actual sending.

Structural Provisions in home church & Xenos

Missions Division

Financial support – Body of Christ & XCF

Missionaries on the field

Home support teams

Missions Mobilizers

Conclusion

- *You will be and probably already are change-agents in your home church, and will be in Xenos.*
- *You should mature in your understanding of the biblical principles behind church structure, not communicating that this is the way “Xenos does it.”*

Assignment

Read Master Plan of Evangelism Chap 1 (“Selection”) and write a paragraph summary of content and a paragraph of personal application.

Read the articles by: Burge and Elkins and hand in a short written critique of each.

Study for Quiz

Memory Verses

Mt. 28:18-20**

Eph. 4:11-16 **

Key Points to Know for Exam

1. Be able to diagram the biblical methodology for determining church structure. Be able to defend why this methodology is important.
2. Know what "wine" and "wineskins" are.
3. Be able to argue for the central mission of the church as “evangelism and discipleship in the context of Christian community” using Scripture to back up your argument.