

2 Timothy 3:16-17**A Holistic Vision***Jimmy Snowden**Sovereign Grace Fellowship: Sunday, January 3, 2009****Introduction***

Just a little over a year and a half ago I sat down with my now-fellow elders and we discussed the possibility of me becoming one of their co-elders (co-pastors). In my conversations with them Moe specifically stated that he wanted to see me fulfill the role of preaching, teaching, and vision. After a good deal of discussion this seemed like the best course of action and it soon followed that this would be my specific role in the body here at SGF. I almost immediately began fulfilling the responsibilities of preaching and teaching. The roles of preaching and teaching are clear cut. If you pour your mind, time, energy, and heart into both the preparation and delivery of lessons and sermons, you are fulfilling your responsibilities as a preacher and teacher. These responsibilities are concrete. The visionary part of my responsibilities, on the other hand, is not as clear cut. How does a man “cast a vision” for a church? Although I have never inquired from Kevin and Moe what it means to be a ‘pastor of vision,’ what a pastor of vision usually does is provide direction for a church. A vision is an idea of where you want to go. We refer to it as a vision as opposed to a ‘reality’ because the purpose of a vision is to give us an idea of where we want to go but are not yet there at the present. As the pastor of vision it is my responsibility to prayerfully consider what the primary goal of our church is, and then to implement strategies to bring that vision to fruition.

Some churches completely reject the idea of having a pastor of vision. They suggest that setting goals and implementing strategies to meet those goals is contrary to being led by the Spirit. I couldn’t disagree more. The fact is that the church is to have direction, and it is also true that the Spirit works through His people *not* as they put their brains in their pockets but as they prayerfully brainstorm how their goals might be brought to fruition. The Spirit who empowers and directs us is the same Spirit who has given us minds to brainstorm, plan, and strategize. The problem comes in when either 1. the visionary depends more on plans and strategies than on the Spirit who makes the plans and strategies effective or when 2. the vision is unbiblical in nature.

I must confess that I had a pretty confident opinion of my vision casting abilities when I first stepped foot into the pastorate. After much struggling and much unlearning I began to see that my ability to both provide direction and to bring that direction about was not as keen as I once thought. However, over the past few months after much prayer, Scripture study, thought, and brainstorming, I really feel that the Lord has confirmed to me a direction for Sovereign Grace Fellowship.

A Statement of Vision

Don’t get too excited. The statement of vision that I am about lay out for you is not something that will knock your socks off. This is one of the problems with modern day Christianity; everyone tries to do everything they can to accommodate the palate of our culture. They adopt their statement of vision to meet some pressing felt need in the culture. They create a flashy banner and a smooth and slick saying. They communicate that their vision can be accomplished within a year or two if the people just put their heads together. However, generally speaking, that which is most valuable will cost you the most to get. If you want quick, easy, and cheap, expect a quick, easy, and cheap product. If you want something that will transform and

change forever, be ready to strap on your boots to take a long, uphill, grueling climb. Most things that bring a ‘wow’ factor over a crowd are worthless. Cheap and slick tricks just don’t work when it comes to the growth and health of an organism (the church) which finds its very vitality in something that we humans cannot call down or conjure up on whim (the Spirit of God—see John 3).

If we want true transformation and change, it will cost us all something. I am not up for the path of least resistance. I want to see SGF used mightily of God and I in no way want us to cheapen out and get there by the way of a short cut. If short cuts worked I would grab them as fast as I could. The unfortunate thing, however, is that most short cuts result in short circuits (ok... so the pun was a bit of a flop, but you get the point).

Every leader in the church likes to live with the impression that he has the silver bullet; that agenda which will solve all of the church’s problems. You will notice that most pastors are simply agenda driven. Their statements of vision revolve around 1, 2, or 3 major agendas. They observe the great deficiencies in modern day Christianity and adopt biblical agendas to correct the problems. These agendas then make up their statement of vision. The only problem is that this sort of an approach generally results in either 1. over correcting problems and/or 2. deemphasizing other vital portions of God’s word.

Before I move on, let me first say that the statement of vision that I have drafted up is based on 2 Timothy 3:16-17;

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Notice the word ‘All.’ Although Paul was primarily referring to the Old Testament Scriptures here, it goes without saying that all of the new revelation dispensed through Christ and His apostles would fit under the umbrella of ‘All Scripture.’ And this is the problem that I have with many statements of vision; the pick and choose just two or three biblical precedents to establish who they are at the very root of their existence. Although they may revolve the very foundation of their church around two or three centrally important aspects of the Christian faith, their vision lacks a certain width. I have become convinced that a church’s statement of vision must be a vision which embraces all of God’s word. After all, as can be seen from the next verse, the word of God is the primary tool God uses to save (1 Peter 1:23), shape and equip (2 Timothy 3:17). The Spirit works His transforming, converting, and conforming power through the word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Secondly, notice what the word of God is purposed to do. It’s purpose is to ‘complete’ every man or woman of God and to ‘equip [him or her] for every good work.’ This is the result of the word in the life of the believer. Here is my stab at a statement of vision for SGF. With this text in mind, then, let me lay forth a statement of vision for SGF.

Statement of Vision: SGF will be a body of believers which functions with the express purpose of producing lovers of Jesus who live, believe, and obey the entire Word of God (with a view to the progressive nature of God’s revelation).

I want to clarify that this statement of faith in no way replaces the statement that is found on the sign in front of the church and in the front of your bulletin; “A Family Church Rejoicing

in the Grace of God.” This is more than anything a statement of identity. What are we? We are a ‘family church rejoicing in the grace of God.’” The statement of vision answers the question, “What are we here for; what is our mission; where are we headed as a church?” And the answer to questions like these is, “we are a body of believers which functions with the express purpose of producing lovers of Jesus who live, believe, and obey the entire word of God.” This is where we are headed; this is the goal which directs and informs each and every single one of our ministries.

I have written a short explanation of the statement of vision.

An Explanation of the Statement of Vision: The goal of our every ministry at SGF is to emphasize what God’s word emphasizes, to the degree that God’s word emphasizes it, in the way that God’s word emphasizes it, without deemphasizing anything else that God’s word emphasizes.

You see, this is what drove the formation of this statement of vision; a commitment to not emphasize what the Scriptures emphasize to the detriment of anything else that the Scriptures have to say. The goal is to not be an agenda driven church, but to be a **holistic church**; a church which does not pick and choose which parts of the Bible are acceptable, relevant, or easy and discard the rest. A holistic church is a church which embraces the entirety of God’s word with a view to live, believe, and obey all of it. I would like you to consider exactly how foundational the Bible is to the ministry of the local church. A church may form a statement of vision around any central aspect of Christianity and yet not be pleasing to Christ. Consider the following examples.

1. “SGF will be a Christ-focused church.” There is absolutely nothing wrong with such a statement of vision. However, which Christ is the church going to be focused on? There are many Jesus’ running around out there in the culture. Which one is the church going to follow? Are they going to follow the Jesus of the Jehovah’s Witness movement who is not co-equal with God the father, the homosexual Jesus of liberal Christianity, the mamby pamby Jesus of modern day pop Christian culture, or the Jesus of the Bible? Ultimately, the Bible is foundational to even our understanding of who Jesus is. Second, it must be understood that there are churches who ‘focus’ on Jesus Christ in a way that is unbiblical. For example, many many many Baptist churches in the Bible belt focus on Jesus to the neglect of the Holy Spirit. Such an emphasis on Jesus is unbiblical; they collapse the trinity into a duality, consisting only of Father and Son. So, how does one focus on Christ in way that brings glory to God? These answers are found in the word of God. The word of God must remain foundational, informing every aspect of our lives.

2. “SGF will be a Gospel-centered church.” As with the first, there is nothing wrong with such a statement of vision. However, which ‘Gospel’ is the church going to be centered on? There are many false ‘gospels’ being promulgated from many pulpits throughout America. Martin Luther King Jr. preached a social Gospel. His Gospel didn’t focus on Christ’s work on the cross as the way in which sinful men can be restored to their heavenly father. His Gospel emphasized justice to the poor to the neglect of the biblical doctrine of the atonement. The Judaizers in Galatia preached a Gospel of faith in Christ plus the works of the law. Ultimately, the Bible is foundational to our understanding of what the gospel is. Second, how does one keep the Gospel at the center of the church? For example, some churches refuse to emphasize works as they are emphasized in the Scriptures (James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-6) out of an attempt to keep

the Gospel central. So, how does a church keep the Gospel central in a way that brings glory to God? The answers are found in the word of God.

3. “SGF will be a church which seeks to glorify God in all that we do.” This, once again, is an excellent vision for a church to have. But foundational questions must be asked. Most importantly, the question, “How does one bring glory to God?” must be asked. After all, how many times have we witnessed Christians doing unbiblical things ‘for the glory of God’? There are no formulas. How does one bring glory to God? By living, believing, and obeying the entire word of God.

Let me put it to you this way; if we emphasize what the Scriptures emphasize, to the degree that the Scriptures emphasize it, in the way that the Scriptures emphasize it, without deemphasizing anything else that the Scriptures emphasize, Christ will be the center of the church. Why? Because the Bible tells us to keep Him at the center of the church (Colossians 1:15-20). *If we emphasize what God’s word emphasizes, to the degree that God’s word emphasizes it, in the way that God’s word emphasizes it, without deemphasizing anything else that the Scriptures emphasize, we will do all things to the glory of God, the Gospel will be at the center of our every action (1 Cor 15:1-6), Jesus will be our focus, we will be a praying church, an evangelizing church, a truth-loving church, a discipling church, a giving church, a missions-minded church, a Spirit-filled church, a community-based church, a sin-hating church, a discerning church, a repenting church, a loving church, a missional church, a passionate church, a church which cares for and provides the needs of the poor, the sick, the weak, the orphans, and the widows. And why? Because God’s word emphasizes all these things.*

I am not saying that any church who does not share our statement of vision is biblically off. I understand that this is just the unique emphasis that the Lord has given me. I am just sharing with you the method behind the madness. But this is something that I can fight for. I can live and die for the truth of God’s word. If we fight to keep the Bible foundational to all that we do, and say, and think, everything else will fall into place.

What about Studying, Preaching, and Teaching

I want you to notice one thing about this statement of vision; notice that there is no comment regarding the study or preaching of God’s word. Our goal as a church is to ‘produce lovers of Christ *who live, believe and obey the entire word of God.*’ Why do I not add in there the tasks of studying, teaching, and preaching? For two reasons. 1. This is a statement of vision. A statement of vision has to do with where you want to end up—it is a statement of goals. The goal of this church is not simply to produce smart people, but rather to produce ‘lovers of Christ who live, believe, and obey the entire word of God.’ Bible study is not an end in itself. The purpose of Bible study is to learn and meditate on truth that is to be lived, believed upon, and obeyed. The goal is to produce people who are thoroughly transformed by the Spirit-inspired word. So study is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

2. I also want you to notice that the studying, preaching, and teaching of the word of God are presupposed in the statement. After all, how can you believe a truth you don’t know? You can’t. Let me ask you a question. How many of you just five minutes ago believed that my father-in-law’s middle name was Allen? Absolutely none of you. Why? Because you didn’t know that his name was Allen five minutes ago. You have to know something before you can believe it. An understanding of truth is essential to belief. This is exactly what the apostle Paul says in Romans 10:13-15.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed. And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher. And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: **How welcome are the feet of those who announce the gospel of good things.**

What is Paul's reasoning? He argues backwards. He says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. He then says, and I am paraphrasing, 'How *can* someone call on the name of the Lord if they have not believed? No one who believes will call on the name of the Lord.' He then goes on and says, and I am paraphrasing, 'How *can* they believe without first hearing about Him?' In other words, how can anyone believe on Jesus if they have never heard of Jesus? Apart from the dispensing of the truth of Jesus, there can be no belief in Jesus. You can't believe in Jesus if you don't know about Him. Notice the repetition of the phrase "How can" in the passage. Paul is saying that it is impossible for someone to believe in Jesus if they haven't heard of Jesus.

The same is true when it comes to obeying the word of God. I remember getting my license way back when I was 16 years old. I drove to school every day on gravel roads. About a month after getting my license I remember driving down the gravel road to school and it dawned on me; I didn't know what the speed limit was. I began to look for speed limit signs. After driving back and forth to school every day for about a month I gave up looking for speed limit signs. For some reason, at least when it came to the gravel roads on which I traveled, no speed limit signs were posted. I generally went about 35-45 miles/hour. To this day I am not sure if I was breaking the law or not. Either way, I can remember thinking to myself, "How can I obey the speed limit if I don't know it. Surely, I might be driving the speed limit, but I am not doing so out of obedience to the government. Honestly, the only reason I am going 35-45 mph is just because it seems like the right speed to go." How can you obey a command or a law that you don't know? You can't. If you want to be a lover of Christ who lives, believes, and obeys the entire word of God, you have to know it, and if you want to know it, you have to study it.

So, why do I not add the word 'study' to the statement of vision? Because it is presupposed in the statement. How can you believe and obey the entire word of God if you don't know it, and how can you know if you don't study it. The study of the word of God is implicit—it is the means to producing lovers of Christ who live, believe, and obey the entire word of God.

Concluding Thoughts

1). *No Demolition Necessary*: First, I want to say that I am thankful to the Lord that SGF is well on her way to being a church which treats the Bible as the very foundation of all that we believe and do. As I was laying forth the vision for SGF most of you were probably thinking, "But wait... aren't we already doing this?" My answer; "Yes, we are already doing this as a body." I feel that SGF has already begun down the road of doing everything we can to produce lovers of Jesus who live, believe, and obey the entire word of God. However, there are huge strides that have to be made. And ultimately, this is a goal which we will never reach *with perfection* this side of glory.

2). *An Invitation*: What this morning is more than anything is a formal invitation; an invitation to adopt a church wide vision for SGF. And I must say that this is ultimately a community project. The church must work together as a unit. If the people of God can work

together toward one common, unified goal our impact for the cause of Christ will be exponentially larger. If we all live off on our own fulfilling our own Christian duty in isolation we will have targeted impact here and there, but the more people you have swinging the same hammer the greater the impact. So often the reason why the church is ineffective to fulfill her bible-driven mission is because she is not working as a machine. In a car all of the parts work together in unison for a common goal; to make the car drive down the road. When any one of those parts (as miniscule as each may seem) decides to quit its unique job, the car breaks down.

Oftentimes, the people of God get distracted by their own pet agendas. Their peripheral issues and pet agendas end up taking center stage in the church, and the overall holistic health of the body is put in the back seat. But when the church can adopt one clear and concise foundational goal, the body can operate as a well-oiled machine. All of the parts, even if they are doing separate ministries, can ultimately do their duty with an understanding that they are one part of a large organism that is working toward a common goal. A statement of vision oftentimes helps the congregation get focused and stay focused on a *meta-goal*.

It also provides each individual an understanding that he/she is part of something much larger than him/herself. You are not an isolated individual pursuing God in your own little microcosm. Ultimately, you are a Jesus lover in the context of other Jesus lovers who have mutually adopted a common goal. That means that when you change a light bulb, crunch numbers, wash the dishes, or take care of the kids in the nursery you are ultimately doing it as a co-laborer; you are doing it with a knowledge that your part in the body is essential for the unhindered actualization of this meta-goal.

3). *Steadfast Endurance*: The most difficult thing about casting a vision is that it takes steadfast endurance to implement it. There are so many needs to meet, so many tasks to be done, so many ministries that call for our attention and time and talents. The most difficult thing about making a vision stick is in the amount of discipline and hard work it takes to make the vision a reality. The pursuit of producing lovers of Jesus who live, believe, and obey the entire word of God is not a quick and easy task. This is not the sort of thing that you put a deadline on. In other words, I cannot tell you; “Well guys, if we just discipline ourselves in the task of living, believing, and obeying the entire word of God, we should be able to reach our destination in 5 years flat.” No! This is a call, an invitation, to embrace a life-long journey—a life-long pursuit. If you ever feel that you have arrived in the area of living, believing, and obeying the entire word of God, you are either dead or extremely prideful.

4. *Expository Preaching*: Expository preaching is essential to fulfilling this statement of vision. Most preachers today preach what are termed, ‘topical sermons.’ A ‘*topical sermon*’ is merely a sermon which seeks to deal with any given topic in detail. When a pastor sets out to preach a topical message his purpose is not necessarily to teach the main point of any one passage, but rather to simply preach on any given topic whether it be marriage, parenting, tithing, evangelism, or the Trinity. Generally speaking, the majority of American’s like topical sermons much more than expository sermons. An *expository sermon* is a sermon which seeks to teach the main point of a specific passage as it is found within its unique context. Expository preachers generally teach through books of the Bible verse by verse, line by line, word by word. Expository messages are generally less attractive than topical messages because they are much more involved, The purpose of good expository preaching is stick close to the text, deriving the content of the message from the text itself. Most people find the Bible to be boring and thus when one sticks close to the text they find the preaching boring. However, Moe, Kevin, and I are all convinced that expository preaching ought to take preeminence over topical preaching. This is

not to say that we will never preach topical messages (after all, this very sermon is a topical message), but it is to say that our focus will be on preaching through books of the Bible verse by verse with a view to emphasizing the main point of the passage in consideration.

There is one main benefit of expository preaching (there are more, but this is the only one I have time to emphasize this morning): it forces the preacher to preach the whole counsel of God's word. When you preach through a book of the Bible verse by verse, line by line, word by word if you skip over any given word or phrase it will be obvious. The preacher cannot simply pass over an uncomfortable passage, a difficult passage, or a passage that doesn't quite square well with his theological system. This sort of preaching is absolutely essential to fulfilling the proposed vision. After all, the vision statement, based on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, focuses on 'producing Jesus lovers who live, believe, and obey *the entire* word of God.'

Conclusion

I get excited thinking about the potential of what God may do through us here in Boscawen. We here at SGF have so much to look forward to. If we unite with one common goal, fighting as an army of one, there is no telling what sort of an impact we can make for the Kingdom of Christ. Please tell me that you have not grown up too much to dream. Do you still believe that God can use SGF to bring all of New Hampshire to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? Don't grow up in regard to your zeal and faith.

I believe that God will do great things through us and for us; but we do have to collaborate, we have to unite. We have to put feet to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, emphasizing what the Scriptures emphasize, to the degree that the Scriptures emphasize it, in the way that the Scriptures emphasize it, without deemphasizing anything else that the Scriptures emphasize. If we unite around this one common goal, there is no telling what God will do through us.