

The Church as a Window

By Bob Moffitt

Man's Brokenness

What examples of human brokenness have you seen, heard about, or encountered this week? What physical problems have you seen? What sickness, death, or poverty? What spiritual problems have you encountered? What evil, idolatry, or corruption? What social problems have you noticed? What broken personal relationships? What social injustices? What else? Evidence of brokenness is everywhere! When we read the newspaper, watch television, or look at what is happening around us, we see many, many example of brokenness.

Romans 1:21 helps us understand the brokenness of the human race:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

This passage paints a very bleak picture of broken people. This is quite a different view than we saw in Genesis 1:31, when God looked at His creation and said that it was very good. But a few chapters later, in Genesis 6:6, the Bible tells us that God grieved that He had ever made us! What changed God's evaluation? It was disobedience—the human race was not living as God intended.

This is true—and not only in Genesis. All through the Bible, the people of God's Creation have rebelled against His ways. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that this is the condition of our world today. We are disobedient. We do not live as God designed and calls us to live.

Man's condition without God is bleak. We see that as we look around us or read the news—and Scripture confirms it. Genesis 6:5 tells us that all of the inclinations of the human hearts are evil. Romans 3:23 reminds us that all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's will. Ephesians 2:1 says we were dead—hopeless in our trespasses and sins without God. Finally, Romans 2:5 tells us that, without God's intervention, we would be headed for His wrath.

When teaching this lesson, we look at these Scriptures and then ask the participants to divide into small groups. The small groups each take a piece of paper, and draw a picture on the bottom half representing man's condition without God. We encourage them to think creatively. We must fully understand the broken nature of the human race. How would you illustrate man's broken condition without God?

Yes, mankind's condition without God is desperately broken—but God does not want us to remain broken. In John 3:17, we learn that Jesus came to save, not to condemn broken people. Philippians 2:5-11 reminds us that Christ was a servant who willingly emptied Himself and came to die on behalf of broken people. Our God is amazing. He has a plan to redeem our brokenness. This is definitely good news for all of mankind.

God's Intentions for the Future

Scripture also affirms that God has wonderful plans for the future. In Isaiah 11:4-9, there is a vision of peace and plenty. In Isaiah 61:1-4, we are told that we are going to participate in the restoration of creation. In John 14:1-4, we hear that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. Romans 8:21 assures us that all creation is going to be liberated from the bondage that occurred in the Fall. In Revelations 21:1-4, we read of a beautiful future—with no death, no tears, and no pain. Finally, Matthew 19:28 tells us that Jesus will return as King. God has a plan for the future, and it is better than we could imagine!

When teaching this lesson, after we have looked at these Scriptures, the participants are asked to return to their small groups to illustrate what they have seen in scripture regarding God's plan for the future. Returning to the paper with the first drawing, on the top half of the paper, participants draw another illustration to represent what these verses say about God's intentions for the future. What would you draw? Many groups have produced intricate illustrations to depict God's intentions for the future. One simple illustration for this is a three-dimensional oval, containing these words that describe God's plan for the future—No Death, Peace, Plenty, and God Lives with Us.

These completed illustrations highlight the striking contrast between man's broken condition without God and God's wonderful intentions for the future. In our broken condition, every inclination of man's heart is evil, all have sinned and come short of God's glory. Man, without God, is hopeless. In fact, unrepentant man is headed for God's wrath.

But . . . God sent Jesus to save us, not to condemn us. There will be peace and plenty. We will participate in the restoration of all that is broken. Jesus is preparing a place for us. All creation will one day be completely liberated from its brokenness. God not only loves the people He created, but His future intentions include the healing of all creation. His now-broken creation will one day be fully liberated from its bondage, and Romans 8:19-20 tells us that this liberation will be tied to the "glorious freedom" of the children of God. There will be no death, pain, or tears. Jesus will return as King of Kings! The nations will see, abide by, and enjoy the blessings of God's glory. Revelations 21:24 tells us that "the nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it." God's agenda encompasses the complete healing of broken people and the broken creation, including nations!

Is this good news? Yes, it is wonderful news! But what we do with this good news is of utmost importance. We can live under the dark cloud of brokenness and wait for future deliverance—or we can participate in God's vision for the future.

Here is a story to illustrate what this means. A few years ago, Bob Moffitt was visiting in Lima, Peru. He met a young man named Rudy. Rudy had recently become a believer, and his life had been radically transformed. Rudy was a middle-class young man who had compassion for the poor, and he wanted desperately to share this good news of the Gospel with them.

He decided to do something so one day he got on a bus and rode to the slums at the edge of Lima, carrying a pocket filled with tracts. He got off the bus and walked up to the first young man he saw. Rudy said, "Hello, I'm Rudy. What is your name?" The man replied, "I'm Juan." Rudy asked, "What are you doing here?" Juan said: "I'm unemployed. I don't have a job. I'm

hungry. I've got all kinds of problems." Rudy took a tract out of his pocket and said, "Here! This tract will tell you about a solution to your problems." The young man said, "I don't need your tract. I know what it talks about. It talks about Jesus. I don't need your Jesus!" Rudy replied, "But Jesus can solve your problems! He wants you to be with Him for all of eternity." Juan said, "I need bread now." Rudy told Juan, "Jesus is the bread of life! Read this tract. It will really help you." Finally, Juan said, "I want to show you what I think of your Jesus." He took the tract, he ripped it up in little pieces, and he put it in his mouth. While a stunned Rudy watched, Juan slowly chewed the tract and swallowed it. He told Rudy, "I told you! I don't need your Jesus. I need bread!"

As Rudy told Bob this story, tears were streaming down his face. He said, "I realized I could never tell the poor about Jesus unless I could also take bread." So Rudy organized his friends, and they started a bakery. They sold bread. With their profits, they took bread to the slums. They gave bread away and told the people about Jesus. I think Juan has a message that many of us need to hear. The world is broken, very broken. And the broken people are saying, "I know you have good news for the future—but isn't there any good news for me, now?"

Yes, there is! Sin interrupted God's good intentions for the world, but God's plan is to fully reestablish His intentions. Future healing is yet to come, but there is also reason to offer hope for substantial healing and restoration in the present. God calls His people to be a present expression of the future reign of Christ. Full restoration will follow Christ's return—but now—God's people are charged with the responsibility to carry out His will here "on earth as it is in heaven"—to extend His reign on earth and "occupy" the territory¹ until He returns.

God has given His people the opportunity to participate in the grandest purpose in history. He allows us to be stewards. Our actions impact eternity. Nothing we do in accordance with His will is insignificant. The widow who gave her two coins at the temple never imagined the 2000-year impact her gift would have. We, too, make an impact that will reach into future generations, far beyond what we can know or see at this time. If the people of our churches could understand the relationship between their lives and the wonderful intentions God has for mankind—both in the present and the future—they would see that there is no greater cause for which they could live or die.

God's Present Intentions

Does God have any good news for now—for the present? Yes! His good news is not only for the future. Think of how He taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). On earth as it is in heaven! We may have recited this prayer so often that it has become meaningless. But it is not meaningless—it is powerful!

Where is God's will done? According to the Lord's Prayer, it is done in heaven. But Jesus taught us to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is done in heaven. God has intentions that His will be done, in the present, on earth. What would happen if God's will were done on earth as it is done in heaven? What would happen if God's will were done in your community or in

¹ Luke 19:13 KJV

your nation as it is in heaven? Earth would be very much like heaven! (Of course, God's will is done perfectly in heaven; on earth, in the present, it is only done incompletely.)

Knowing God's Intentions and His Will

What are some general aspects of God's will for the present? In John 14:13 we see that, if we love God, we obey Him. God's will is that we do His will! Matthew 28:18-20 affirms that doing His will includes discipling others to obey His will, too. Often, people remember only one part of the charge that Jesus gave to His church in the Great Commission—to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. But that is not the whole task. It is just the beginning of the task. After people have come to Christ, we are to disciple them to do God's will. If we have not done that, we have not finished the Great Commission's task. We must also disciple others to obey all that God has commanded.

How do we know God's intentions—His will? We do not instinctively know His will, yet we have often even made knowing His will overly complex. We need revelation from His Word and His Spirit for what it means to do His will. Psalms 119:99-100 reminds us to meditate on and obey His Word. Proverbs 2:1-5 urges us to accept God's Word to know His will. John 16:13 affirms that it is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth.

Abraham's chief servant provides an excellent model for us. He made an oath with Abraham to go back to Abraham's country to get a wife for Isaac. He left for his journey and as he was going, the Lord led him. He had no idea what to do and how to find a wife that would agree to return to a foreign land. So, as he was going, he continued to seek the Lord and each step of the way, the Lord faithfully led him and the servant followed (Gen 24:48). There are some simple truths for us to learn from in this example: Be on a journey, seek the Lord as you are going, listen to Him and obey what He shows you to do. It is of little use to seek to know God's will if we are not already on the journey of obeying what you already understand of His intentions.

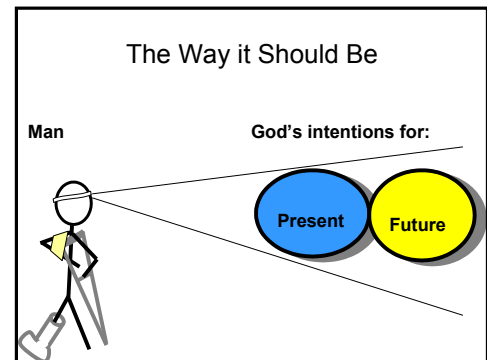
Do all Christians in our community find God's will this way—searching Scripture, guided by the Spirit and obeying what they understand of what He is showing them? What would happen if all who claim to be Christians in our community would seek to know God's will as they make decisions about how they are to live and would then obey what their Father told them to do?

God's Intentions for the Present

What does God tell us in His Word that He wants us to do in our personal lives? Many things! Acts 14:22 urges us to endure hardships. Ephesians 5:17-20 exhorts us to be sober and Spirit-filled—singing and thankful. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and 11 tell us to live holy, pure, productive lives. Do all who call themselves Christians in our community endure hardship? Are they sober and Spirit-filled, singing and thankful? Are they living holy and pure and productive lives? What are God's intentions for our families? In Ephesians 5:21, we are told to be submissive and respectful of one another. Ephesians 6:4 tells us to train our children in holy living. What are God's intentions for our relationships with our brothers and sisters? In John 13:34, we are told to love each other, and John 17:20-23 instructs us to live in unity. What would happen if all the Christians in our community sought to know God's will and live as He commands? What if we all lived holy, pure, productive, respectful lives in our personal lives and families? What if we were united in our relationships with other believers? There would be a revolution!

What are God's intentions for our present relationships to the needy of the world? In Romans 13:9, we are commanded to love our neighbors. In James 1:27, we learn we are to care for widows and orphans. In Jeremiah 22:3, 15, and 16, we learn that God expects us to advocate for those in need. What are God's intentions for our relationships to employers, servants, government, and enemies? Colossians 4:1 tells us to be fair to those under our authority. 1 Peter 2:13-15 commands us to respect those in authority over us. Romans 13:1 also exhorts us to submit to those in authority. Luke 6:27, 35, and 36 instruct us to love our enemies and bless them. Do all Christians in our community live according to God's will in these ways? What would happen if, at 9 o'clock next Monday morning, all of those who call themselves Christians would begin to live this way? It would be more than a revolution—it would be a revival! People would be drawn to God.

The impact of our obedience goes far beyond our own relationships with the Lord. We use this drawing to illustrate the significance of our obedience to God's intentions for the present and the future. We are being watched—not only by God, but also by the broken people of the world. As we obey God, we demonstrate His love and concern for them in the present as well as in the future. This is the way it should be! When the broken people of our community look at us, they should be able see God's good intentions for both the present and the future.

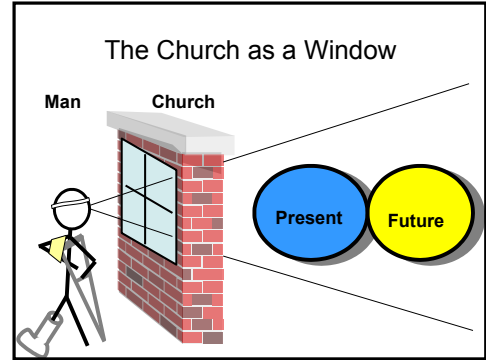


They should see not only His good intentions for the future—the saving grace of God and rescue from eternal death. They should also see the great good news that God has for them NOW. They should see this, but they often cannot. Why? There is a wall that obstructs their vision. This wall is the wall of sin. We like to believe that it is the sin of the world that keeps the broken people in our communities from seeing God's purposes. No, it is not only the sin of the world—it is our sin and disobedience. It is our unwillingness to live the way God calls us to live in the present representing God's purposes to the broken world around us. “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us” (II Corinthians 5:20).

If you were God, what would you do to that wall? People often say that they would knock the wall down and destroy it! Be careful about that answer, since we are also talking about ourselves! Also, we know from Scripture that, until Jesus returns, sin is not going to be completely removed from the world. Instead, God has done something else with the wall of sin that keeps the world from seeing God's good intentions. He has put a window in the wall! That window is the Church—the Church of Jesus Christ. God intends, as the broken people of our community look through the window of His Church, that they will see His good news for the present and the future.

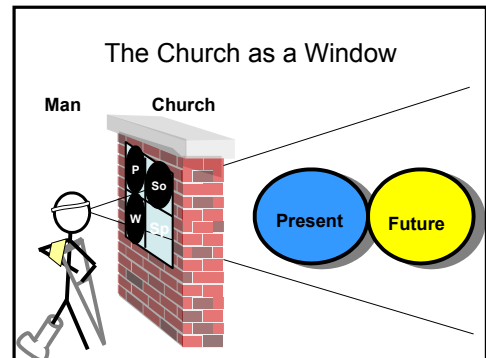
The Church as a Window

We use a four-paned window illustration in this lesson. Each pane represents one of the four areas in which Jesus grew—“Wisdom,” “Physical,” “Spiritual,” and “Social.” Because Jesus grew in these four ways, let’s think of them as four areas of God’s concern for human healing and growth. The church is the window through which broken people see God’s good intentions in all of these areas. What do some churches do with this window?



- Some churches look at the pane marked “Physical” and say, “We don’t do physical ministry! We leave that to the government and welfare agencies.” When this happens, the windowpane is darkened. The broken people of our community cannot see God’s concern for physical needs through the window of the Church.
- Another pane represents God’s intentions for healing of all kinds of social brokenness. Some churches might say: “This is not our mandate. We are not engaged in social work!” The windowpane becomes darkened, and broken people cannot observe God’s intentions for social healing through the Church.
- Another pane represents wisdom. Churches might say, “We are engaged in wisdom—but only for people in the Church. They must come into the Church before they can learn God’s wisdom.” When that happens, this pane is darkened. People outside the Church cannot see God’s intentions for their growth in wisdom.

- The final part of the window is the spiritual pane. Churches might say: “Yes! We are called to proclaim the spiritual good news!” When the broken people of the community look through the window of the Church, then, what is the only thing they see if the physical, social, and wisdom panes are darkened? They only see God’s spiritual intentions. The spiritual area is of enormous present and future importance, but broken people may not know this. They may be like Juan, the young man Rudy encountered in a squatter slum of Lima, Peru. He tore up and swallowed the tract Rudy offered him—to make a point. He was saying, “I’m not interested in spiritual good news for the future. I’m hungry now! Does your God have any concern for me as a hungry, unemployed man—now?”



Our churches need to clean their windows! Broken people need to see through all the panes. God wants Juan, and all of his brothers and sisters who are broken, to be able to look through the window of the Church and see God’s good intentions for them in all areas of God’s concern—physical, spiritual, social, and wisdom.

There was an informal survey on a downtown street in the U.S. many people were asked, “If you were facing a major crisis in your life, where would you turn for help?” No one thought to

mention the Church! People do not know the Church as the Church that Jesus intended. If your church closed up tomorrow, would your community care? Would they even notice?

A few years ago, Bob was teaching church leaders on the Muslim-dominated island of Mindanao in the Philippines. Tension between Muslims and non-Muslims was high. The last day of the conference, ten people dressed in Muslim attire came into the church where they met. A hush fell over the audience. The organizers of the conference discovered that these were new Christian converts, delayed four days at military checkpoints on their way to the conference. They told their story. For many years, Christians had come to their village, preaching and handing out tracts. The village people rejected the message. Recently, a group of people had come to the village simply to minister lovingly to needs of the people. Only later did the village people discover that these caring people were Christians. The impact of this ministry was so powerful that these villagers came to Christ. The words of the last speaker, a teenage girl, are words of wisdom to us. Christians had come to her village doing traditional evangelism for years, but only when the Gospel came wrapped in love and good works did it reap a harvest. She concluded with an unforgettable question: “What took you so long?”

Pictures of the Church

What takes us so long? It is our sin and disobedience. God’s plan for His Church is great! There are a number of metaphors that Paul, Jesus, and Peter used to describe the Church. (A metaphor is a word picture.)

- The Church is a **priest**. Israel was to be a priest to the nations, and the Church today is like God intended Israel to be in the OT. We are to be a priest to the people outside the Church. As they look, they should see us obeying God’s will and thereby representing who He is.
- The Church is **salt and light**. We often ask groups of people: “Do you like salt?” Almost everyone does! Then we say, “I’d like to give you an experiment. When you have your next meal, take a large spoonful of salt and eat it.” Their faces immediately react! “You don’t like that? I thought you said you like salt! Oh, you like it, but you don’t like it so concentrated! You want it sprinkled around!” Our churches are often like a spoonful of salt—too concentrated. God says, “Get out of the spoon! Go into the community. Sprinkle yourselves out there!”
- The Church is an **embassy of the Kingdom of God**. Jesus sent His disciples out as ambassadors, so our churches are embassies. Embassies, as we know, represent the intentions of the government they represent. We must represent the intentions of the Kingdom to which we belong.
- The Church is a **letter**. Paul wrote that we are like open letters, read by all. Sometimes, it is hard for people to read God’s letter when they see our lives. We need to be a legible letter that demonstrates God’s good news for the present.
- The Church is also an **obedient servant, a good neighbor, and a first taste of something delicious**. Bob has a grapefruit tree in his backyard. In the late fall, the grapefruit begins to ripen. He looks for that very first grapefruit that’s ripe and ready to

be eaten. He finds it, picks it, and peels it. He can't wait to take that first bite. It's delicious! He then knows what the rest of the fruit of that tree will taste like when they become ripe. That is a first fruit. But sometimes we are unripe, immature fruit. When the world bites into us, the taste is bitter. They spit us out. But God wants us to be a delicious first fruit—a first taste of His Kingdom.

There are other pictures of the Church that we did not cover in the lesson. The Church is the Body of Christ. As a body, the Church should carry out the intentions of its head, Jesus Christ, and each member has a unique function in this body. The Church is also the bride of Christ. God loves the Church with an infinite love. The intimate relationship between Christ and His bride provides high motivation for the Church to do His will. The Church is also the principal administrator of God's agenda to heal the broken world. It is the communicator and facilitator of the agenda and equips its members to go into every corner of society to do God's will.

It is important to apply what we learn! We often ask people to draw a window, label each section with one of the four areas of Jesus' growth, list two new activities in each area that their church could do to demonstrate God's present intentions in their communities, and commit to discuss these ideas with their church leaders. As you read this, you too can do this.

There is a new breeze blowing among the churches today as they learn to be embassies of God's full intentions. This breeze has the mark of the Spirit. It creates a longing to demonstrate God's full agenda in a broken world. There are individuals and churches whose sails are catching that breeze. It is our prayer that God will use them to turn the breeze into a mighty wind. The people of the Church should be such a clear and compelling witness of Christ's love for the spiritually, socially, and physically broken that all who see through the window of the Church will say, "What a loving and great God these people have!"²

This reading is a combination of two articles by Bob Moffitt: *Man's Need – God's Future Intentions*, and *God's Present Intentions - The Church as a Window*.

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² Several remarks in this narrative have been taken directly from *If Jesus Were Mayor*, also written by Bob Moffitt. Used by permission.