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VISIONS AND DREAMS *for the* YOUNG AND OLD



By Morris Yates

Have you ever dreamed of what you wanted your own home congregation to be and look like? When visions of what a truly biblical church would be like come dancing onto the stage of my mind's eye, the visions and dreams of young and old blend in Christ. Here is my dream and my obligation to see it come to be. I believe there's room in this dream for all to live out their faith in God. Could this dream ever be ours?

I would like to see our congregation become increasingly like our great model, Christ. It was in Christ that God gave us his fullest disclosure of himself. I would like for us to have an ethos that would foster, encourage, and promote, both in individuals and in the corporate body, deep personal faith in, and relationships with, God. Relationships that are motivated by gratitude flowing from hearts that have an appreciation for the mighty and gracious acts of our powerful and loving heavenly father. Not just a historical faith or appreciation, but a vital and vibrant one. An environment in our family

that does not hear a burden of "shoulds and oughts" but is invited to revel in his acts of love, because by them we are helped to fall ever more deeply in love with God. An environment in which God is our hero and we are motivated to love like he loved. A fellowship that glories in his deeds of old and that depends on him now, because we have come to him to fill a want and we have a need to be satisfied in him. A body that focuses, not on form, but rather on content. Sometimes primitivism seems so hopelessly divisive, and I want a family that is unified in Christ, not necessarily uniform. All of the gifts Paul mentions in Eph 4:11–13 function to build up or edify the body. Our target is to come to the "full stature of Christ." Christ, the fullest disclosure of God, would, in my dream, be front and center in all things! It is this mind of Christ that is to find its home and rule in us. On the cross God showed us how power is to be used legitimately. Since we all have some power in some sphere, I want to be a part of a family that is

learning how to love like he loves. That is not the same thing as being told that we "ought to" or "should" be or do something. I want to be a part of a family that helps me trust him more day by day. One's life is not transformed by a constant stream of "shoulds and oughts" mentality, but by a "lifting up" that draws people to live like Emmanuel lived. I want to be a part of a family or army or—you pick the metaphor—that can help me and us live a life before God and before my fellow human beings that has the "drawing" power of what Leonard Allen calls a "cross-shaped life." "Oh, for a faith like that. . . ." I want to be a part of a family that can help me or any seeker have a faith like that. Does that mean our family will grow in number? It does, I believe, at least mean that we will grow more like the "stature of Christ." God will take care of the increase. I want to be a part of a family in which my life and our lives don't betray Christ and his message. I want to be a part of a family that tolerates divergence and is not

sectarian in orientation, a family that is more concerned with unity in Christ than with conformity to a set or sets of understandings generated by things like an application of Baconian thought to Scripture or Zwingli's negative rule of Scripture. I want a body that trusts more in God than in knowing the correct doctrinal position. I have spent a lifetime trying to "know it right," and all I have found is that there is no peace in

trying to "know it right"—only the fear of being wrong. God's grace must save me in the end or I am undone, for knowledge does not save or motivate to selfless living. I want to be in a family that does not lose track and that helps me to not lose track of what is fundamental, a family that handles the text responsibly and, to that end "*sola scriptura*," with a remembrance and an attitude of humility that understands that all

readings are an interpretation and subject to human error.

Is this dream anything like what God wants us to reflect? Does it get at the fundamentals of our life together? Could the *I* ever become *we*? Could a church family like that be your home, too? Is it just a useless daydream?

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Notes from "Theology of Small Church"

Notes on page 204

¹Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 11; idem., foreword to *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, by William H. Willimon and Robert L. Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 7; idem., *The Small Membership Church: Scenarios for Tomorrow* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 43–50.

²Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different*, 12.

³Bradley Blue, "Acts and the House Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting*, ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 120–21, 189; Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 35.

⁴John McRay, "House Churches and the Lord's Supper," *Leaven* 3, no. 3 (1995): 14; Banks, 35.

⁵Blue, 121.

⁶Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different*, 19.

⁷Schaller, foreword to *Preaching and Worship in the Small Church*, 8.

⁸Willimon and Wilson, 15.