



“Why the Church Exists”

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It's great to have you with us today. We're here to open the word of God and learn from it. It is God's storehouse of timeless treasure and spiritual supply. Paul referred to the things within it as *the unsearchable riches of Christ*, so it's worth your time and mine today to spend this half hour studying it. We're going to talk about the church today and why it exists. Jesus told His followers that He would build a church (**Matthew 16:18**). Today, approximately 2,000 years later, that church still exists in communities around the world. But why is the church here? Why does any congregation of the church of Christ exist within a community? That is an important question to consider. Our text will be taken from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 3:8-11 “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:”

The church is the result of God's eternal purpose and planning. It did not randomly appear, nor was it the result of a grass roots movement that sprang up in the first century. Rather, the plans for it were laid from the very foundation of the world by God Himself. The church is important to God and it should be to us as well. But, what is its purpose? What was God's design in its creation?

People have all kinds of conceptions about what the church is and why it exists today. Some have many expectations of the church, and if the church doesn't live up to those expectations they reject it. What are God's expectations for the church? That's what matters. What is the church in the business of doing if it is serving and pleasing the Lord?

In our text, Paul makes several points about the church as God planned and produced it. First, it is the result of God's eternal purpose:

Ephesians 3:11 “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:”

The manifestation of God's wisdom and His overall plan for mankind was a mystery to us since the beginning of time, but NOW His wisdom and His purpose are made known, on display for us to see. In other words, we can now see the bigger purpose and scheme behind what God was doing down through the ages. His plan was being unfolded in the development of the human race and was finally revealed and placed on display when Jesus Christ came and completed His work here on earth. How is that plan revealed? Paul said it is displayed in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:9-10 “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,”

God is the supreme architect of the church--NOT man. That implies that God had a pattern or design for the church. Since it is the product of God's wisdom, He had a plan and purpose for it, and it is not whatever we choose to make out of it. If a church leaves God's design and pattern, then it is no longer His church. God not only had a design for how people would become a part of His church and how it would worship and function, but He also had a plan for why it would do so. He had an aim and purpose behind it all—not only eternally, but also for the here and now.

The church is a body of baptized believers in Christ. We have been baptized into *one body* (**I Corinthians 12:13**). That body is made up of disciples who are joined together in local congregations of like faith, local congregations of the church of Christ (**Romans 16:16**). Each congregation is organized to work within itself to fulfill the varied purposes that God has for it. But, again, the question is, what are those purposes? Why does the church exist?

I. The church exists to proclaim the gospel.

Paul told the church at Philippi that they were to “*shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*” (**Philippians 2:16**). That is the posture of every congregation of the New Testament church that is fulfilling its God-given purpose: to hold forth the gospel to all those around it who are lost in sin. Any church that is not first and foremost in the business of preaching the gospel to the world by convicting people of sin, calling them to repentance, and pointing them to Christ for salvation is not doing what it was appointed to do.

Jesus didn't tell His apostles to go out into the world and make it a socially and politically better place. He didn't tell them to go out into the world and make it a better and more comfortable place to go to Hell from. Rather, this is what He told them:

Mark 16:15-16 “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

That is commonly called “the great commission.” Matthew records the event this way:

Matthew 28:19-20 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

Simply put, that is the mission of the church toward those outside of it. God desired for every congregation of the church of Christ to stand as a beacon of light in its environment, penetrating the darkness of sin by shedding forth the light of the gospel, the good news of Christ and His spreading kingdom.

II. God designed the church to edify and equip the saints.

In other words, teaching the truth and grounding disciples in the word of God. That is the function of the local church. Paul said that the structure and design of the church was “*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12)*”. Christians need to be spiritually fed in order to survive, let alone grow and thrive. Christians need the fellowship and encouragement of fellow believers in order to be strong. We need discipline and training in righteousness to avoid the pitfalls of sin.

The church is to provide those things. It is the responsibility of congregational teachers to indoctrinate and edify the church. I know that the word ‘indoctrinate’ may be a startling or unpopular term today, but in essence, that’s what teachers of God’s word are instructed to do with Christ’s disciples. We are to be indoctrinated with the truth of God.

II Timothy 2:2 “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

We also just read Matthew’s account of the great commission where Jesus not only told His apostles to *go and make disciples, baptizing them*, but also to *teach them to observe all things* He had commanded them (**Matthew 28:19-20**). That is the function of the local church.

Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

On another occasion, referring to a member of the church who was living in immorality, Paul told the church at Corinth this:

I Corinthians 5: 4-5 “**In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.**”

That is talking about enacting discipline in order to correct the ungodly and erring church member. So, training in righteousness is the responsibility and work of every congregation in regard to its own members.

III. The church’s assigned role is to care for its own in need.

Acts 6:1-4 “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the

daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

What this passage tells us is that it was the practice of the early church to see to the need of widows and other members who were genuinely in need.

Acts 2:44-45 "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

So, caring for members in need is another function of the church.

IV. God made the church a place where members were to worship together.

Acts 2:41-42 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them (the church) about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine (teaching) and fellowship (giving financially for the work of the ministry), and in breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper, which they came together to partake of every first day of the week), and in prayers."

We have an example of the church at Troas:

Acts 20:7 "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them..."

So, these are the functions of the church. It is not only a spiritual relationship of people to Christ; it is also a visible congregation of believers from place to place who are bound together to preach the gospel, receive training and education, care for one another's needs, and worship together. That should be the sole mission and work of the church today.

Unfortunately, people have prostituted the church and have gotten her involved in all kinds of things for which she was not designed, nor intended to be involved with. Let's spend the remainder of our time today talking about what the purpose and mission of the church is NOT. We need to carefully take note of these things.

I. The church does NOT exist for social reasons.

The church is not a social institution per se. That isn't to say that the church will not affect change in a society, because if it is doing the work that Christ assigned it, it WILL indeed change the world. The kingdom of God is like leaven that influences all that is around it. The question is, HOW does the church do so? Well, it doesn't do so by pushing or even forcing an agenda of change upon a society. I'm going to say some things here that may surprise you.

The church's job is not to eradicate poverty from a society. Jesus one time said, "*For ye have the poor with you always...*" (**Mark 14:7**). The church will never erase poverty from a society, nor is it commissioned to do so. The church's job is not to bring financial, ethnic, or racial equality to the

culture around us. Certainly, we should desire equality among men. We don't judge one another on the color of skin or the ethnic background we come from and so forth. But the church's job is not to bring these social reforms to the world by pushing a political or societal agenda.

Neither is it the church's job to stop abortion, as horrible and sinful a thing as it is. It's not the church's job to stop a government from allowing it. Nor is it the church's job to stop any other kind of violence, whether it be gun violence, war, or whatever else. The church's job is not to make the population of a country or the world more moral. None of these things are the church's job. Before you tune out, let me tell you what our job IS. Our job is to preach the gospel and thus convert men and women to Jesus Christ and His teachings. When we do that, then we have an influence upon the culture. When we convert people to Christ, their lives will change; not because of the government or some civil law that is passed, but by virtue of the transforming power that Christ exhibits in their lives.

The word of Christ will change people for the better. When the word of Christ is received in one's heart, it will change him into a new creature. When people are converted to Christ, they understand that it is wrong to murder, to commit abortion, and other acts of violence. They won't do those things. They will live peaceable lives because of the change the gospel has made within them. When people are converted to Christ, people will treat those from other races, cultures, and ethnicities with love and equality, because Christ teaches us to do that. If we show respect of persons, we sin (**James 2:9**). When you preach to people and convert them to the Savior, their lives will become moral and upright because Christ destroys the hold that sin has upon a person's life. People who truly follow Christ don't lie, cheat, steal, murder, or commit adultery.

You see, people are distracted from the mission of the church today because we've been somehow led to believe that we can change the world by advancing a Christian agenda, whatever that may be, as opposed to actually advancing Christianity. There is a difference between those two things.

II. The church does not exist to be a political entity.

Romans 13:1-7 shows that God ordained civil powers with earthly, worldly leaders to legislate and enforce civil laws and to keep order in civil society. The church operates in a different arena. Its field of operation is in the hearts of men, and not some piece of earthly geography.

John 18:36 "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world..."

But I see a lot of professing Christians who get steeped in politics and affairs of earthly government. They get a lot more bothered and exercised about what's happening in Washington or at the State House than they do about what's going on in the church house. They worry a lot more about Republicans or Democrats being in control of the country than they do whether Christ or the devil is in control of the hearts and minds of their neighbors, friends, or even their own minds. Friend, the church's fight is *spiritual*, not carnal.

II Corinthians 10:4 "**(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)**"

That phrase *strong holds* is speaking of Satan's strong holds in the minds of men; it's a spiritual battle. Again, the way Christians are to influence the culture is by being the light of the world and the salt of the earth, working night and day to win hearts to Jesus Christ. When we focus on that,

we'll have a much more powerful effect on the world than by any march, protest, piece of legislation or court decision that we might otherwise bring to bear.

III. **The church does not exist to provide secular education.**

As much as everybody needs an education to mature, get a job, and function in society, it is not up to the church to provide it. It is up to the church to educate the souls of men with the gospel, not the carnal minds of people with reading, writing, and arithmetic. There is not one bit of evidence that the first century church involved itself in those purposes and pursuits.

IV. **The church does not exist to provide sports and recreation.**

I enjoy recreation as much as anyone. When I'm not fishing for men, I like to be fishing for fish. But it's not the church's job or place to provide me with that opportunity or any other kind of fun, games, or relaxation. The word *fellowship* as used in the Bible really has nothing to do with coffee, donuts, pot luck suppers, volleyball, or softball games. *Fellowship* refers to *our joint participation in the blessings and work of Christ*.

Don't misunderstand: there is nothing wrong with Christians getting together and enjoying one another's association, playing games, going camping or to a theme park, whatever it may be, as long as the activity itself is wholesome and not sinful. In fact, it's a wonderful thing for Christians to spend time together. Recreation and relaxation has an important place within our daily lives. But it is not the purpose or mission of the church to organize, build, plan and pay for such. As individuals, we may get together and have a good time, vacation together, etc. But there is not one bit of Bible authority to sanction such as the mission and work of the local church.

Today, churches have ball fields and complexes, health clubs, playgrounds, banquet halls, concert halls, and nearly every other entertainment outlet. I say that not only is that NOT why the church exists, but that it also distracts from the reason why the church DOES exist.

V. **The church does not exist to make money or to be in business.**

The work of the church is funded by the freewill offerings of its own members that are given upon the first day of every week.

I Corinthians 16:1-2 "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

That's what Paul taught. The Bible says nothing about the church raising money for any other purpose or in any other way. It seems that some churches operate pseudo-businesses, getting involved in all kinds of enterprises, maybe even as a means for advancing their work and their cause, but that is without scriptural warrant. The only business the church is in the business of is the business of the King. It is solely our responsibility to make sure that business is carried out. Not to rely on the world to fund it.

The work of the church, as simply and straightforward as it is, is funded God's way. The church as God planned it, you see, is the divinely appointed and executed institution, and it is able to accomplish exactly what God wanted it to by being what God designed it to be.

This study sets forth truths that we all need to consider. It is my firm conviction that in so many ways, we have drifted away from God's original design and intent for the church. It is high time that we return to the book, to a *thus saith the Lord* of the scriptures, and that we pattern ourselves after the church that Jesus Christ planted in this earth two millennia ago. That is not only possible but is necessary if we are to be the people of the Lord.

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