



"The Mission of the Church"

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Why do congregations of the Lord's church exist? What is God's purpose for them? Nearly any entity that survives and succeeds has a mission. If you start a business, that business needs some kind of mission statement to give it purpose and direction; to remind its employees why that business exists and make it more likely that the business stays on target and is successful. An organization or business runs into problems when it loses sight of its purpose and mission. That is true even in our individual lives as well.

So, why did Jesus build His church? That is to say, why did He bring Christians together into a living, cohesive, working, active body? What is the mission of the church? It seems we've forgotten that, to a large degree, at least in America in the 21st century. We've been studying about the church that Jesus built in the recent weeks. We've seen what it is and is not; when and how it was built; why it's essential to be a vital and active part of it. Today, we'll look at several verses in **Ephesians** to see why Christ built it.

In **Ephesians 2**, Paul writes about how Christ built the church, admitting both Jews and Gentiles into it, and revealed its plan and purpose. He continues in the next chapter:

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 foreknowledge and planning. Paul says that its very existence declares the wisdom of God unto all. We should never forget the mission of the church of Christ, and we dare not divert its focus away from that which Christ intended for it to accomplish in this world.

A successful business or organization usually formulates a statement of its mission, then its investment and effort goes toward fulfilling that mission. Some great companies have been built around a particular philosophy or mission. For example, the online sales giant, Amazon.com, has this as its mission statement: "It is our goal to be earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online." Ebay's mission statement declares that they want to "provide a global trading platform where practically anyone can trade practically anything." Google's stated mission is to "organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

It's pretty obvious that all of these companies have succeeded in their respective missions. Not only do they do on a daily basis what they say they have set out to do, but any of us who are familiar with their platforms immediately associate those characteristics with their names or brands. That's a successful mission statement, and their mission statements have effectively made them successful.

Well, we want the church to succeed. But succeed at what? Thankfully, you and I don't need to come up with a mission statement for the church. The Lord and His apostles already took care of that. It doesn't take a collaborative team, an agency or a boardroom filled with bright executives to craft a mission statement for the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom was given its marching orders, its business plan, its mission statement, two thousand years ago by the head of the church Himself as He prepared to enter heaven and take up His place as head of the church and King of His kingdom. The problem is that we forget what that mission is sometimes.

Jesus told His disciples just before He ascended back to glory the following:

Matthew 28:18 "...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 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 alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

That great commission given to His disciples—which they fulfilled in their own day (**Colossians 1:23**)—encapsulates the purpose of the church even today. Jesus' own mission to earth was so succinctly stated to Zacchaeus:

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

That's why Jesus left the portals of heaven and came to earth. His birth, His life, His deeds, His miracles, His words, His death, His resurrection were ALL to accomplish His stated mission of *seeking out and saving those who were lost and condemned*. He didn't come to be a political revolutionary, although some mistakenly thought so. He didn't come to found a charity, or to make the world a brighter place to go to hell from. He came to *seek and to save that which was lost*. He told His disciples that He would build His church upon returning to heaven, and that their mission would be to take the testimony of His death, burial and resurrection to the lost world.

II Corinthians 4:5-6 "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath

shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

So, the gospel was entrusted into the hands of men, the earthen vessels known as the apostles, to illuminate the world that was steeped in the darkness, blindness and ignorance of sin. To put it in a nutshell, that's what the church and its mission in this world is all about.

I hate to begin on a negative note, but there is so much misunderstanding today about why the church exists in the world. People have all sorts of expectations of the church. Maybe when they begin seeking a local church to assemble with, they have a number of expectations about what that church should be, what that church should be busy doing. So, we're going to begin by discussing what the church is NOT. First, the church is NOT a political entity or political power. In fact, Jesus drew a clear line of distinction between the two.

Matthew 22:21 "Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

Yes, everything is under God's domain, but there are two separate realms of activity. God has ordained civil state to keep civil order in the world, but His kingdom of Jesus Christ—the church of the Lord Jesus Christ—has a spiritual mission that has nothing whatsoever to do with politics or the affairs of the civil state.

Romans 13:1-2 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."

Here, the apostle Paul described the Christian's relationship to whatever government the church may be found living under. He says that God uses civil authority for civil purposes in the world, and Christians are to submit to that authority and that power, the exception being when man (or the government's decree) would cause us to violate the decree of God. In which case, the apostles said that *we must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29)*. The Bible tells us that short of that, we are to live quiet and peaceable lives, rendering tribute to the government, and to be submissive citizens.

You don't read in the Bible or in early church history where the disciples of Christ went about trying to subvert the Roman government, or mount an insurrection or revolt against the rule of the Romans. They went about the world preaching the truth and exalting the crucified Christ. They did so at great expense—even at the expense of their own welfare and their own lives. They didn't try to operate by changing the government; they tried to change the hearts of men by the preaching of the truth.

Sometimes men who purport to be national or worldwide religious leaders, preachers, representatives of some religious organization or faith will give speeches or interviews, and you'll never hear the name of Jesus come from their lips. They never tell the audience before them what to do to be saved from their sins. Instead, they issue their opinions of this or that political issue or social controversy. Friend, that's not what the church is all about. It is NOT a political institution.

Secondly, the church is NOT a social reform institution. Make no mistake: Christianity WILL reform a society, but it does so by changing men's hearts by the gospel. When men are converted to Jesus Christ and His way of life and they begin to live by the law of the kingdom, ruling their lives according to the rule of King Jesus, then obviously and naturally, you will see a change in the environment in which we live. But Christianity was not founded in order to affect social change through the governments and powers of earth. The church is not expected to, nor will it ever, eradicate poverty in the world.

Matthew 26:11 “For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.”

That doesn't mean that we are not to help the poor. Individual Christians are to take pity and have compassion on those less fortunate, and do as we have ability and opportunity to help them. But the church's mission is not to go out and eradicate poverty, disease and suffering from the world.

Remember what Peter told the lame man who was laid at the gate of the temple daily, who expected Peter and John to give him money as they passed by?

Acts 3:6 “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.”

Peter met the man's greater need and the reason for that was that the gospel was being preached in that place, and five thousand people had obeyed the gospel and were saved from their sins. The church is not commissioned to make people happy on the highway to hell, but to get them off that highway of life spiritually. To preach Jesus to them and get them in an eternally saved condition.

Thirdly, the church is NOT a recreational outlet. Fun, games, fitness, whatever else has become the rage of religion in our time. Many churches not only preach a social gospel, but they preach a sensual gospel as well. One that is appealing to the petty, fleshly, carnal appetites of people in order to bring them in and pack their pews. They treat the church like some sort of business entity that has a bottom line and a number quota, so they employ all kinds of gimmicks to bring in the crowds, to excite and entice the young people.

There is a time and a place for Christians to eat together and enjoy one another's company on a social level, and I'm all for that at the right time and in the right place. But the priority of the church is not recreational enjoyment. It is nearly impossible for me to imagine churches of the first century organizing ball teams, chariot races, fitness clubs, or putting on concerts, building banquet halls, or employing theatrical devices to try to get people to come in and listen to the gospel. Can you honestly, as you read the book of Acts, imagine that? No doubt they associated with one another and showed hospitality from house to house. But their mission and their work was serious business—not fun and games. They didn't compete with one another for the best gimmick to draw people to the assemblies. Rather, they *went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4)*.

Romans 14:17 “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

Many times, people get wrapped up in temporal things, forgetting the big picture. That is what the kingdom of God, the church of Jesus Christ is all about. That's what the mission of the church IS: to make known the spiritual verities of life and eternity.

Philippians 2:15-16 “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.”

I Timothy 3:15 “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

The church's mission is to declare the truth to the world, to save those who don't believe by preaching the gospel to them so that they can hear, believe and obey it. Isn't it really time for the church to simply be the church and stop being everything else that God never intended or appointed for it to be? There's something refreshing about that to me. Can you imagine what we could accomplish if we spent as much money and dedicated as much time and energy to preaching the truth to a lost and dying world as we do to building large, lavish, gaudy, impressive buildings, family life centers, gymnasiums, theaters...etc? Just a simple place to come together and worship, and go forth from every week to tell others about Jesus Christ and His truth?

Friend, that's what it's all about. Not all of the other stuff that has come to characterize "church" and "Christianity" over the past fifty years.

I Corinthians 1:21 "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

The church's number one mission is to preach the gospel. That's what it's all about.

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 alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

It's not only the responsibility of the church to save the lost, but then to train the saved. How do we strengthen disciples? How do we edify the church? Jesus said by *teaching them*. Teaching them what? *To observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*

The bottom line is this: any church that is pleasing to God and is fulfilling its God-given mission is one that is started by the word, preaches the word, is grounded in the word and lives the word. It's all about upholding the word of God to a lost world and serving as *the pillar and ground of the truth*. The church's mission is also to mutually care for itself.

I Corinthians 12:24-27 "For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Paul likens the church to a body with many parts, and says that members are to have the same care one for another. The church is a body of believers, united by mutual faith in Christ Jesus, and it is to live and function as a body: to care for, encourage and support each other as we make our way through this world to our eternal home. That's one of the major reasons why YOU, my friend, need to be a faithful, accountable, active part of the local church if you are a baptized believer in Christ Jesus.

Fourthly, the local church exists to glorify God in all of these things that we've talked about.

Ephesians 3:21 "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

The local church does not exist to make a name for itself in the community. Not to acquire or yield some kind of political power. The work assigned to it by King Jesus is not so that the church can point to itself and boast of all that it does in the world by its power and influence in society. No, its mission, purpose and design is so that we can bring glory to God by upholding His truth, bringing souls to Him, and preparing people to spend eternity with Him in heaven. That's the mission of the church.

Lastly, I want to mention the all-sufficiency of the local church. It is God's mean and medium of accomplishing the work assigned to His people. The early church knew nothing of parachurch organizations, missionary societies, denominational organizations and hierarchy. They certainly knew nothing of the gimmicks and amusements that many have employed to advance the cause. Read the book of **Acts**. They went forth into the streets, synagogues, homes and public squares, simply declaring Jesus Christ and Him risen. People were converted to HIM—by the thousands at a time—simply because the early Christians were faithful to preach and to live the word.

Could it be that we see a decline in Christianity in our culture because we've lost sight of the simple mission of the church? Have we lost our zeal and our commitment to that simple mission? Each Christian working under the oversight of his/her local church and being a soul winner for Jesus every day. Is the gospel message continually burning in our hearts, pouring from our lips and exuding from our lives? That's what the church is planted in your community for.

I hope that you are a faithful, active part of the body of Jesus Christ in your community. I want to plead with you to investigate the churches of Christ because we are truly dedicated to the mission of proclaiming the gospel to the world, pointing men to Jesus Christ and salvation through obedient faith in Him. You won't find thrills, frills or gimmicks, but people who simply want to follow the teachings of the New Testament and hold forth the word of life.

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