

38. WHY THE CHURCH EXISTS

Bible Reading: Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-16.

Aim: The main purpose for the church's existence is to evangelise the world and build up believers.

Introduction: Many people who attend churches wonder what is the purpose of the local church. Some people ask, 'Why go to church?' 'Why go to this particular church instead of another?'

Question: Why did Jesus Christ institute the church?

Answer: Jesus said, 'I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' (Matthew 16:18). This tells us that local churches are to attack the gates of hell, and take captive hell's prisoners. Let us study several reasons for the church's existence:

1. To preach the Gospel and make disciples (teach) of all nations.

God wants us to evangelise the world with the blessed message of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The Great Commission is stated five times by Jesus Christ in the following passages:

- a) Matthew 28:18-20 '**Go** ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising 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.'
- b) Mark 16:15 '**Go** ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.'
- c) Luke 24:47 'And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'
- d) John 20:21,23 'As my Father hath sent me, even so **send I you** . . . Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.'
- e) Acts 1:8 'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.'

The main reason God leaves His church in the world is to save people from hell by preaching the gospel. Gordon G Johnson writes: 'One day Dr Wilfred Grenfell, medical missionary to Labrador, was guest at a dinner in London, together with a number of socially prominent British men and women. During the course of the dinner the lady seated next to him turned and said, "Is it true, Dr Grenfell, that you are a Missionary?" Dr Grenfell looked at her for a moment before replying. Then he said, "Is it true, madam, that you are not?"' (*My Church*, p 88).

2. To edify believers

Edify means to build up believers in their spiritual life. Edify (3618, 3619) comes from the word 'to construct, or to be a house-builder.' Edification is the purpose for which a church exists as a gathered community. Most of the New Testament was written for the edification of believers. These letters were sent to churches to be read and studied for their spiritual growth and development.

The following verses teach us about edification:

- a) I Corinthians 14:26, 'Let all things be done unto edifying.' Every believer should seek to build up each other, rather than to pull each other down.
 - b) I Thessalonians 5:11, 'Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.' Strive to build up each other, and to establish each other in Bible truths.
 - c) II Peter 3:18, 'But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'. Christlike character may be cultivated as much as one wishes to possess. Growth in grace may begin as a grain of mustard seed, and will increase as it is cultivated. To know Jesus Christ means to possess correct views of His person as fully God and fully man, His character, teachings & work.
 - d) Jude 20, 'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.' We should establish ourselves most firmly in sound doctrine and in fulfilling our Christian duties such as prayer.
 - e) Ephesians 4:11-16, Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were given to:
 - i) Perfect the saints;
 - ii) Fulfil the work of the ministry;
 - iii) Edify the body of Christ (v.12,16).
Their job is to build up believers in knowledge, in truth and in godliness.
3. **To glorify God:** 'That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him . . .' (II Thessalonians 1:12). **How do we glorify God?** Through our:
 - i) Praise and prayer. 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.' (Psalm 50:23; Hebrews 13:15).
 - ii) Fruitbearing. 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples.' (John 15:8).
 - iii) Believing and obeying God's Word. 'He (Abraham) staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.' (Romans 4:20,21).
 - iv) Preaching the Gospel. 'Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified . . .' (II Thessalonians 3:1).
 - v) Suffering. 'If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.' (I Peter 4:14,16).
 - vi) Preaching God's Word and servicing. 'If any man **speak**, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man **minister**, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.' (I Peter 4:11).
 - vii) Giving. 'But to do good and to **communicate** forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' (Hebrews 13:16). To communicate is to share what you have with others.
4. **To baptise believers.** 'Baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' Matt.28:19. God commands churches to baptise, and believers to be baptised after salvation.

5. **To teach believers God's Ways.**

'Commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to **teach** others also.' (II Timothy 2:2) .
'The servant of the Lord must . . . be apt to **teach**.' (II Timothy 2:24).
'These things command and **teach**.' (I Timothy 4:11).
In the church ' . . . that by my voice I might **teach** others also.' (I Corinthians 14:19).
'For when for the time ye ought to be **teachers** . . .' (Hebrews 5:12).
(Acts 5:42
'And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to **teach** and preach Jesus Christ.' God wants us to pass our Bible knowledge on to others.

6. **To provide fellowship for believers.**

'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship** . . .' (Acts 2:42).
'James, Cephas and John gave to me and Barnabus the right hands of fellowship.'
(Galatians 2:9). Fellowship (koinonia=2842) means "partnership, social participation, communication, contribution and distribution." God designed people for fellowship, not for isolation. God has put in the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved. This is best achieved in a local church.

- a) The **basis** of Christian fellowship – the person of Christ (I John 1:3).
- b) The **nature** of Christian fellowship – sharing doctrine and goods (Acts 2:44-47).
- c) The **danger** of **losing** Christian fellowship by sin (I Corinthians 10:16,21).
- d) The **responsibilities** of Christian fellowship are to:
 - i) Bear one another's burdens;
 - ii) Gently restore one another (Galatians 6:1);
 - iii) Comfort and exhort one another;
 - iv) Edify one another;
 - v) Pray for one another;
 - vi) Forgive one another;
 - vii) Rebuke sin in each other. (Ephesians 5:11).

7. **To provoke each other to love and good works.**

'And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is . . .' (Hebrews 10:24,25).
'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith'. (Galatians 6:10).
By coming to church, we can do good to those attending. We can provoke them to do good works and to show love to others. If we forsake church, we can't encourage any fellow believers, and we are saying that we don't care about them.

8. **To act as a restraining and enlightening influence in this world.**

'Ye are the salt of the earth . . . Ye are the light of the world.' (Matthew 5:13-16).
If we work together in church we can have a bigger impact on the world for Christ.

9. **To prepare rulers for the future millennial kingdom.**

'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him . . .' (II Timothy 2:12).
'Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' (Matthew 25:21,23).

Conclusion: The task of a local church is to make as many people like Jesus Christ in the time God has given us. God the Father so greatly loves God the Son, that He desires to populate the universe in eternity with people like Jesus Christ. (I John 3:2). He wants to start the work in repentant sinners now.

Challenge: Are you working with God in this church to achieve this goal to your greatest ability? Your service to Christ now will have a great effect in eternity.
Therefore, let us win the lost, make disciples and edify one another in a good church.