

Introduction

Why would God save sinners like us? Why would He send His Son to die for us? Why would he establish the Church? What's the point in all of this?

There are really no simple answers to questions like these, but there is an ultimate answer. God saved men and created the Church ultimately for His own glory. This has always been the point of God setting apart a people for Himself (Ezek 36:21). In the Old Testament it was the nation of Israel that God set apart to be His people and the primary representatives of His Name on this earth. After the redemptive work of Christ was completed God expanded the people of God to include the Church (Romans 11:11-24). This too was ultimately so that the church could represent His name on the earth. Or, to put it another way, God did this for His own glory (Romans 11:36).

Before the foundation of the world God has been working to set apart a people for Himself that would represent His name well by bringing Him glory. He has been working to establish, equip, and enable His people to fulfill the purpose for which they were created—to bring God glory. Thus, the eternal and ultimate purpose of the people of God is the glorify God. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism so aptly put it,

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Ultimately the reason why the church exists is to glorify God.

Although it is a true statement, when it comes to the specifics of church life, it is not entirely helpful to simply say that the church is to glorify God. It is sort of like telling a company of Marines that their purpose is to keep the country safe. It is true. But it does not really help them when it comes to how to fulfill this purpose. That is why Marines are given specific missions. The missions determine how a

company of Marines is going to fulfill its ultimate purpose at that specific time and in that specific place.

Similarly, God has given the church a specific mission so that it can fulfill its ultimate purpose in a specific time (the “last days”) and a specific place (earth). Understanding what this mission is, and how it is accomplished will determine whether or not our church fulfills our ultimate purpose of glorifying God.

The Mission of the Church

The mission of the church is found in the Bible. Specifically it is found in the passage commonly referred to as the Great Commission:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-21

Here we find the specific mission of our church that will enable us to fulfill our ultimate purpose. ***The mission of the church is to spiritually prepare individuals for the Kingdom of God.*** This mission is why the church has not already been taken to heaven to glorify God there. We have been left to glorify God in this time and in this place so that we can represent God’s name to those around us. This is the essence of Jesus’ command.

The command to make disciples is a command for the church to have spiritual influence on individuals. That is what discipleship means. The church has the opportunity to impact the world in a number of ways (economically, socially, culturally, environmentally, etc.). But if the church does not primarily use its influence for spiritual impact then it is failing to accomplish its mission. The

church represents the name of God on this earth by spiritually preparing individuals for the Kingdom.

The work in preparation for the Kingdom of God is of eternal importance. Although the Kingdom of God has already been inaugurated in a spiritual sense, it will not be completely consummated until Christ returns and judges every single individual. At that time, those who have not spiritually prepared themselves for the Kingdom of God by repenting and believing in Jesus will be eternally condemned for their rebellious sin. This is why Jesus' words from Mark 1:14-15 remain true to this day:

Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1:14–15

The Kingdom of God is at hand and it is our job to help individuals prepare for this kingdom. We can't prepare for the Kingdom by helping to create the New Heavens or the New Earth; we can't vindicate the saints; and we can't judge sin. Nowhere is the Church instructed to do any of this. In our time (the "last days" not eternal glory) and in our location (plain ole earth not the new heavens and earth) our mission is not to help God bring about His kingdom. He can handle that on His own. The church's job is to warn and spiritually prepare individuals for this coming Kingdom. That is why the mission of our Church is to spiritually prepare individuals for the Kingdom of God.

The Means for Fulfilling the Mission

Going back to the illustration of the military company, it is not enough for a company to have a mission. They must also have a plan for accomplishing their mission. They must determine the means that they will employ to accomplish their

mission. That same is true of our church. Our mission is to spiritually prepare individuals for the Kingdom of God. There are three primary means that we will employ to accomplish our mission.

Exalting God

The church must be an exalting church. It is to function as a place where the people of God routinely gather together to worship the person and work of God. The church is to be a worshiping community (Eph. 1:6). Because the church exists to exalt God rather than man, it must be uniquely God-centered in all that it does. Corporate worship is to be the central focus of the life of the church.

Equipping Believers

The preaching and teaching of God's word is to be the primary activity of the church, especially on the Lord's Day. To this end, God has given the church gifted men to equip believers through the teaching of the word (Eph 4:11-12). The scriptures need to be taught and explained so that the people understand what God is saying. This explanation must include an explanation of the implications that biblical principles have in the life of individuals. The primary mode of proclamation should be the verse-by-verse exposition of Scripture throughout the entire content of individual books of the Bible.

Evangelizing the Lost

The church carries the mandate to take the message of the Gospel to the entire world (Matt 28:19-20). This requires that the church be an evangelizing church, both to those "next door" and to those around the world. This mandate to make disciples belongs to the entire community of believers. Every individual is to seek out relationships by which they can have a spiritual

influence on another person (i.e. discipleship). Every individual has been providentially placed where they are in life so that they can fulfill this purpose, and bring the gospel to those apart from Christ. It is the church's job to train, encourage, and support individuals in this effort (Eph 4:12).

This is our plan. These are the means that we are going to employ as we seek to accomplish our mission. When we establish, initiate, or evaluate ministries within the church we will be looking for ministries that employ these means to accomplish our purpose.

The Mentality Needed for the Mission

Visiting our illustration of a military company one more time, it is important to recognize that if a company is going to fulfill its mission then it also has to have the right mentality going into the mission. In the case of the Marine Corps, the mentality required to sustain them is *Semper Fi*. *Semper Fi* is not a mission, and it is not a plan for accomplishing a mission. *Semper Fi*, which means “always faithful”, is the mentality that each Marine commits to in order to accomplish their mission. In the same way, at our church we need to commit ourselves to having a mentality that will allow us to accomplish our mission. We must commit to being ***a church that loves the truth, and a church where the truth is producing love in us.***

Notice that there are two components of this mentality.

First, we must be committed to loving the truth. This is absolutely essential. If we are going to spiritually prepare individuals for the Kingdom of God then we must always be understanding, applying, and teaching truth of the Bible. There is no other truth that can save and prepare individuals for the Kingdom. We must love this truth and use it.

This kind of love for the truth is going to manifest itself in the several of the core beliefs of the church:

A High View of God

The church must be committed to a high view of God. An appropriately high view of God is the starting point of all wisdom (Prov 9:10). When the church has a high view of God then all other aspects of church life and theology will fall into their proper places. Specifically, an appropriately high view of God must include, but is not limited to, an emphasis on God's sovereignty (Dan 4:17), His holiness (Isa 6:3), His righteousness/justice (Rom 3:24-26), His goodness (Ps 34:8), and His wisdom (Rom 11:33). Apart from a high view of God the church will inevitably tolerate sin and focus its attention on pleasing men rather than glorifying God. This is why the church must be committed to a high view of God, and a God-centered ministry. When the church draws near to God in this way then God will most assuredly draw near to the church (James 4:8-10)

The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture

The church must be committed to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. If the church has a high view of God then by implication it should have a high view of God's word. Every word contained in the 66 books of the bible has been breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16). This makes it authoritative and sufficient. The authority of Scripture means that it must be believed and obeyed. Whatever it says the church must do! The bible must never be trivialized, marginalized, or disobeyed. Every word that God has provided is necessary to feed and lead the church (Matt 4:4). The sufficiency of Scripture means that God's word is the only standard necessary for the faith and practice of the church. It is relevant to deal with every conceivable situation. It may not specifically address every situation, but it does provide the principles

by which we can faithfully follow God in every situation. Additionally, God's word has been proven true. It always accomplishes its purpose (Isa 55:11). It is always effective for the work of ministry (2 Tim 3:16-17). Apart from a commitment to the authority and sufficiency of scripture the church will not be guided by God. Personal experience and contemporary wisdom will replace the word of God as the driving force of ministry. In the end, when the church is not committed to God's word it can never live up to God's standards. Thus, the church must be committed to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

The Need for Sound Doctrine

The church must be committed to the need for sound doctrine. By definition sound doctrine is systematic teaching that holds fast to the faithful word of Scripture and is accordance with the teaching of Scripture (Tit 1:9). The church has been entrusted with the task of developing and defending a sound theology that proceeds from the authoritative and sufficient Word of God. Specifically, the leadership of the church has the two-fold responsibility to "exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict [sound doctrine]." (Tit 1:9) Doctrine is not optional for the church! The overwhelming trend to water down doctrine or deemphasize its importance must be resisted by the church. The health and fate of the church depend in large part on the ability of its leadership to articulate and defend sound doctrine (1 Tim 4:6-8). Strange and false doctrines are constantly being propagated by Satan and the church must be committed to the need for sound doctrine in order to overcome the schemes of the evil one.

The Significance of a Holy Church

The church must be committed to the significance of a holy church. The church belongs to God and it must be holy as He is holy (Lev 11:45). It must preserve and model a standard of holiness that reflects a true fear of God (2

Cor 7:1). This standard of holiness is critical for the growth of individual believers in the church (1 Pt 1:13-16), and it is critical for the corporate testimony of the church (Phil 2:14-6). In order to maintain a proper standard of holiness the church must first acknowledge the fallen state of man, and then must be willing to confront unrepentant sinners within the church. In some cases church discipline must be implemented (Matt 18:15-17) to protect the holiness of the church and to restore an individual back into this holiness. The dangers in lowering the standards of the church to match the standards of the world are innumerable. At the very least the church would forfeit its sanctifying influence on society, lose its members to sin, and ultimately cripple its ability to please God. Thus, the church must be committed to the significance of a holy church.

The Priority of Biblical Leadership

The church must be committed to the priority of biblical leadership. It must not derive its leadership principles from any other source than the bible. This means, first of all, that the Christ is the head of the church (Eph 5:23) and secondly that Christ mediates His rule over the church through godly elders (Heb 13:7). These elders are men of a godly character (1 Tim 3:1-7) who have been providentially placed in a position of authority over the church. Their role is to feed and lead the church through prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). They are to minister to the church according to the gifts that God has given them. Never are they to lord their authority over the church. They must always remember that their authority is derived from Christ's authority, and thus only valid when based on the word of God. Through love and example they are to gently shepherd the church (1 Pt 5:1-4). A failure on the part of the elders to lead in this way will undoubtedly lead to disunity just as a failure to submit to the elders on the part of the church will lead to disunity. The church must be committed to the priority of biblical leadership; otherwise it will reject the mediated rule of Christ.

These are the areas in which our church's love for the truth will be manifest. If we are not faithful to these core commitments then it is a clear sign that we do not love the truth the way that we need to.

A second component of the mentality that we need to accomplish our purpose is that we must seek to be a church where the truth is producing love in us. In many ways this is the more difficult of the two components. Many churches have excelled in their love of the truth, but they have utterly failed to allow the truth of God's word to produce love in them. This is essentially what Christ said about the church in Ephesus:

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: "The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. " 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.' "

Revelation 2:1-7

If the truth of the Bible is not producing love in our church then our lampstand will be taken from us and we will never accomplish our purpose.

Jesus said that love was the most important virtue for us to cultivate:

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22:34–40

The entire law, *and our mission*, depends upon our commitment to letting God produce love in us through the sanctifying effect of His word.

We must pursue a deep love for our God, and a love for those around us. If we want to make an eternally impact and prepare individuals for the Kingdom, then we must manifest love in our church. As the apostle Paul put it:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:8–13

Our gifts will become obsolete. Our mission will come to an end. Our message will eventually change (when Christ comes back it will be too late to preach repentance). But love never ends. This is why we must be committed to being a church that loves the truth, and a church where the truth is producing love in us.