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FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES:

Church: Purpose of

Why it is important to understand the purpose of the church:

Understanding the purpose of any organization is important for comprehending the reason why that organization exists. This is true for the local church as well. Why does the church exist? Why did Jesus go through all that He did and die on a cross to redeem the church? Knowing the answers to these questions helps people understand the church's purpose. Understanding this will help the church be more focused on and better accomplish its task. When a church does not understand its purpose, it is impotent because it does not know why it exists; why it is doing the things it does.



The purpose of the church:

What is the purpose of the local church? In developing the purpose statement presented here, the Bible passages used speak about two issues: 1) the reason that God saved Christians, and 2) the tasks which He gave them to accomplish in the world.

The first segment of the purpose of the church gives the overall intention God has for the believer; that being God's glorification: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). God's glorification should be the primary reason for all that the believer and the local church do; the statement, "whatever you do," being all-inclusive. Consequently when ministries are carried out (e.g., the preparation and preaching of the Word of God, worship, evangelism, member care, etc.) and people are giving of their time and money to do them, all their effort is to be done as if explicitly for God. Why? Because when one ministers for the glory of God, he should be doing his work purposely for God (Col. 3:17,23; 1 Pet. 4:11). He is not to offer a half-hearted effort, but instead 100%. Therefore the first portion of the purpose statement of the local church is: "The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31)..."

Another purpose of the church is to be a stronghold of truth. The church is described by Paul as “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). Whereas a pillar upholds a structure, the church like a pillar is to uphold the Word of God. It is also to be the “support of the truth.” In other words, in regards to God’s Word, it is to be immovable, firm, and steadfast in its treatment of and conviction and adherence to the Bible. The church is never to buckle under the pressure which the world places upon it to compromise, disregard and/or abandon God’s truth. Instead it is to stand strong, upholding and proclaiming the truth no matter the consequences. Even though the entire world itself were to turn away from God’s Word, the church is to stand as a beacon of it! The expanded purpose statement is: “The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31), through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)...”

The next segment of the church’s purpose takes into account God’s intention for believers in the world; that being proclamation. The truth that is to be proclaimed is twofold. The first truth is found in 1 Peter 2:9, which states: “But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” It is the task of the believer and the church to proclaim God’s excellencies (praises or virtues) to the world. This is to be done because God is worthy of praise and honor. The world needs to know about the greatness of God, for the world must believe in Him through His Son. Psalm 145 is a good example of this.

- 1 “I will extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever.
- 2 Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever.
- 3 Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.
- 4 One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.
- 5 On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.
- 6 Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness.
- 7 They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness and will shout joyfully of Your righteousness.
- 8 The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.
- 9 The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.
- 10 All Your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, and Your godly ones shall bless You.
- 11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power;
- 12 To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts and the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.
- 14 The Lord sustains all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down.
- 15 The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due time.
- 16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.
- 17 The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds.
- 18 The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.

- 19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.
- 20 The Lord keeps all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.
- 21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever.

This is the God whom we serve. Thus one must not only proclaim the wrath and justice of God, but the many other aspects of His character as well. Therefore the expanded purpose statement is: "The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31), through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), through its declaration to the nations of His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9)..."

The second truth believers are to proclaim to the world is found in Luke 24:47, "and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Believers and the local church are also to proclaim to the whole world that it needs to repent in Christ's name for the forgiveness of sins. This need for repentance is seen in other passages as well, such as Psalm 96:10, Matthew 28:18-20, and Acts 1:8. This is the good news that ambassadors of Christ are to communicate because God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. It is His desire that they turn from their wicked ways and repent (Ezk. 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). Again the purpose statement is expanded to: "The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31), through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), through its declaration to the nations of His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9) and His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)..."

The last and final aspect of the purpose of the church considers why God brought salvation to all men; that they be zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14). Therefore it is God's purpose for believers and the local church to be zealous for good deeds, doing them inside and outside of the church for all men (Gal. 6:10); good deeds which are befitting to God (cf. Col. 1:10). This is what God expects, "for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). This is why we are commanded: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16). This is our function as Jesus said in Matthew 5, that we are the salt and light of the world, and "a city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house" (vss. 13-15). Through our good works we are to make a difference, not just be hidden away so that no impact will be made through us in this dark world. Therefore, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:9-10).

The completed purpose statement then is:

The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31), through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), through its declaration to the nations of His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9) and His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), and through its good deeds (Titus 2:14; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 6:10).

This is the reason why the church of Jesus Christ exists. This is to be the underlying purpose for all that the local church does. Knowing this, church leaders need to make sure that all of the ministries their church are involved in bring glory to God through declaring His excellencies, repentance from sin, and through the good deeds which its members produce. The results will be eternal when this is accomplished.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31), through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), through its declaration to the nations of His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9) and His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), and through its good deeds (Titus 2:14; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 6:10).

Is your church working diligently at fulfilling this purpose statement? Please consider each portion of this purpose statement.

1. The purpose of the local church is the glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31)

What are ways in which local church should be glorifying God?

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What are ways in which your church is glorifying God?

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What are ways in which your church is not glorifying God?

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What can your church change so that it will glorify God?

2. God is to be glorified through the church being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

- Is your church a pillar and support of the Word of God? If so, how?
- If your church is not a pillar and support of the Word of God, what can you do to change this situation?
- This truth will touch the very core of your church and its members. So how important is this truth to your church? If it is not important, what can you do to strengthen the position of the Word of God in the reality (daily lives) of your church's members?

3. God is to be glorified through the church's declaration to the nations of His excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9)

- What are some practical ways in which your church can be more involved in declaring God's excellencies (praises, virtues) to the nations?
- How are other churches that you know doing this? Are they being successful?

4. God is to be glorified through the church's declaration of His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to the nations (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)

- What are specific ways in which your church is involved in reaching the lost for Christ in your community?

- Do you have a program to train the members of your church in how to reach the lost?
- How many of your church members witness for Christ on a regular basis?
- How many times a month do you and the leaders of your church witness about Christ to the lost?
- Does your church reach out to the surrounding communities? If not, what are ways you could do this?
- Has your church sent out a cross-cultural missionary, or does it support a cross-cultural missionary in another country?
- Could your church be involved with other churches in starting a church in another community and/or sending out a missionary to another country? What steps can you take to do one or both of these things?

5. God is to be glorified through the good deeds of the church (Titus 2:14)

- Why is it important that your church and the members of your church be involved in good deeds?
- Does your church discuss ways in which it could be involved in good deeds in your community? If not, why?
- How is your church involved in good deeds in its ministry to the members of your church?
- What are some ways in which your church could be more involved in doing good deeds:
 - In your church?
 - In your community?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. What steps do you need to take to make sure that your new church will fulfill the purpose statement of the church?
2. List ideas under each phrase of the purpose statement of how your church, from its conception, will work toward fulfilling these:

The purpose of the local church is

- The glorification of God (1 Cor. 10:31)
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- Through being the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)
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- Through its declaration to the nations
 - Of God's excellencies (1 Pet. 2:29), and
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 - Of His message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; cf. Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), and
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- Through its good deeds (Titus 2:14)
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3. How can this purpose statement help define why your church should exist and what your church will be characterized by?