

What is the purpose of the ministry of the church?

Rom 10:13-15 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

This past week I've just returned from attending our Annual Synod meetings in Shafter, California. As we met and deliberated concerning issues that affect our church I was often brought to the question mentioned above, "What is the purpose of the Church?"

What is the most important thing in a man's life? Health? Healthy people in time will die, old age, if nothing else will bring even the healthiest to the grave. Wealth? Regardless of how much one has gained in this life, the question remains, at death, "Whose then will those things be?" Popularity? Acceptability? But all men know that they will die and after death, ". . . *the memory of them is forgotten.*" Eccl 9:5 Jesus sums it up for us in these words, "*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange **for his soul?***" Mark 8:36-37 What then is the most important possession you possess? If I understand Jesus correctly it's **One's eternal soul!**

Is the purpose of the church then to provide an exercise gym? Or a game room for teens? Or a meeting place for the purpose of exchanging one's own personal opinions? Recently I purposely read through the Book of Acts. Since it is a history of the early New Testament church I wanted to see how the Apostles viewed the purpose of the church in their day. I came to the conclusion that they saw the purpose of the church was, the **proclaiming of the Word of God.**

In fact even when the Scriptures instruct the church in godly living, it is not for the purpose of gaining a self satisfied life, rather it is for the purpose that the church might be a light in a darkened sin cursed world. As we see from the instruction of the Apostle Peter, "*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, **by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.***" (1 Peter 2:11-12) That is, we are to so live that the world might be inclined to ask of us regarding the reason for the hope that lies within us. Thus, recently when I reread the Book of Acts in order to compare the attitude and mindset of the Apostles with what one may observe in the larger part of the visible church today and I have to say I saw little or no similarity at all. In the Book of Acts I saw a church deeply concerned about the eternal souls of mankind. I saw Apostles willing to die, not to engage a congregation in some means of a weight loss program, or how to have a better physical relationship in their marriage, instead I saw men willing to die for the truth of the Gospel and things eternal. Nor did I observe the Apostles attempting to make the message more compatible with the Greek mind who considered the message of the cross as foolishness, nor did I observe them trying to make the message more acceptable to the Jewish mind that saw the preaching of Christ as a scandal, as something offensive. I would remind you that Paul in his ministry was determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. Why? Because he saw Christ crucified as the central purpose as to why Christ Jesus came into the world and therefore the central message of the church.

As Paul sums it up for us in his instruction to Timothy, a young minister of the Gospel, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*". (1 Tim 1:15). This is precisely why Paul told Timothy that his responsibility as a minister of the Gospel was to . . . "**Preach the word!**" (2 Tim 4:2) From the text we are considering, *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*" I would present to you that the question before us is this, "**What is the purpose of the Church?**" More particularly what is our purpose as part of the church of Jesus Christ here in this part of the world we occupy? And throughout this message I want you to keep in mind the command of Christ to His church just before He ascended on high when He said to them, "*Go into all the world and **preach the gospel.***" (Mark 16:15)

First of all calling upon God implies faith and faith requires knowledge, and knowledge requires instruction, and instruction requires teachers. Let us then consider the purpose of the ministry of the Church under these three headings, **1)**The necessity of faith, **2)**The necessity of the Word and **3)** The necessity of faithful messengers of the Word.

- A. First, the necessity of faith. - *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?*
1. The apostle is not talking about faith in faith.
 2. It has been said it doesn't matter what you believe, just so you believe.
 - a. Thus the custom in many churches today is to have a convert repeat a little prayer after the counselor, and then having them sign a decision card without any further instruction or follow-up.
 - b. Need to ask, what is the danger of that practice?
 - (1) It can give that individual a false assurance
 - (2) Often it is also the practice that they are assured that they are now eternally secure.
 - (3) Difference between repeated a prayer and seeing ones need of repentance and faith in Christ.
 - c. It is quite evident that just believing in "SOMETHING" – whatever or whoever - is not what Paul is talking about.
 3. We need to carefully consider the context of this passage
 - a. Paul has pointed out that the Jews believed in God
 - b. In fact he said they had had a great zeal for God
 - c. So what was the problem?
 - d. Their zeal was not according to knowledge
 - e. Therefore we understand that their faith was not in the God of Scripture but a god of their own making.
 - f. One then can only conclude . . . they were lost because they set about to establish their own righteousness and were outside the righteousness of God.
 - g. It might be said they missed heaven by 11 inches, that is, they had a head-knowledge but lacked a true heart knowledge.
 4. Saving faith to be true faith must be faith in the God of Scripture.
 5. This is why the message of the church must be sound.
 - a. For it is entirely possible for one to be a member in the church visible and yet not know the only true God.
 - b. God through the prophet Isaiah warned the visible church of the Old Testament in these words, ***"I have named you, though you have not known Me."*** *Isaiah 45:4*
 - c. One can be like the church in Sardis in Revelation 3, they had a name that they were alive but they were dead.
 6. For one to be able to call upon God their faith must be a true faith in the God of Scripture for He alone able to hear and answer.
 7. Note carefully what Paul has asked in this passage, "how can they call upon God in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe if they have not heard."
 8. It becomes most evident then that to truly believe, to have a true faith requires knowledge,
 9. Some dumbed down message will not suffice

CONCLUSION: Let us sum up what we have learned this morning

True faith is necessary for salvation

True faith is not just believing for the sake of believing

True faith is believing in the True God as He is revealed in Holy Scripture

The Jews of Paul's day believed, in fact were zealous in their religious beliefs but they were eternally lost.

Are there those in the church today in that same condition because the church has not been faithful in disciplining their adherents?

What then is necessary that one might have true faith?