

God's Purpose For His Church

As we in a few weeks will be established as a particular church of the Reformed Church in the United States here in Northwest Arkansas, I want us to understand what it means to be a Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want us to think on this, we are not just a church of a particular denomination, but we are, in truth, a unified body of individuals from all over the world, purposed and designed by God as a means of providing for a continuing body of believers. God intends that the organized church is to be a place where believers will be built up in the most holy faith. I want us to be aware of this truth, the Church is God's decree from eternity and that He designed and purposed it for His people. I read in an article this past week that the survival of individual believers is tied to the church and the more I thought about it the more I came to accept that conclusion as being Biblically true.

I believe the Apostle Paul made it quite clear that our Lord established the church for this reason when he wrote: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Eph 4:11-16

A. The Church is God's design and purpose for His people

1. It is true God saves us as individuals, he does not save groups
 - a. Each believer, in a most personal sense, is called, regenerated, granted repentance and given faith as a child of God.

Jerry Bridges who has written many excellent study guides reminds us, "God does not save groups; He saves individual people. Each of us must respond individually in repentance and faith to the gospel invitation. But though God saves us as individuals, He immediately incorporates us into the Body of Christ.

- b. So we being many, we are individually members of one another - Rom 12:5
- c. God saving us as individuals immediately bring us into the body of the church.

*1 Cor 12:12-14 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body** — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.*

2. For instance on the day of Pentecost we read that God added about three thousand souls to the church and that they continued in the fellowship and doctrine of the Apostles. (cf. Acts 2:41)
 - a. Note a large number, about three thousand were saved on that day
 - b. We know then that each one was granted repentance and faith as individuals
 - c. In history God spoke personally with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David but they all make up that great cloud of witnesses. (cf. Heb 12:1)
 - d. As with Lydia, we read that God opened her heart and gave her understanding so God gives each convert understanding and then they are baptized into the church.

Acts 16:14-15 The Lord opened her heart **to heed the things spoken by Paul**.

- e. In the same way, on the day of Pentecost, by necessity, God had to open each one's eyes and heart individually and then they as believers together continued in the fellowship and doctrine of the Apostles
 - f. We read in Acts 2:47 that ". . . the Lord **added to the church daily** those who were being saved."
3. The purpose that God added them to the church was that they were to be taught, disciplined and brought up in the faith

B. God organized the church and adds believers to the church with great purpose

1. It is most important that we understand that it was God Himself who organized the church - "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers"
 - a. He called men to be apostles that they might establish the church
 - b. He gave knowledge and understanding to them

- c. This Paul God gave understanding that all believers in the fullness of times would be gathered into one body, the church

Eph 1:9-10 “. . . having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure **which He purposed in Himself**, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times **He might gather together in one all things in Christ**, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him.

- d. As a body of believers, as the church, we are joined with believers in the church catholic, with all believers everywhere and from all time past
2. This is why Paul instructed Timothy and Titus as evangelist to set in order the things of the church
3. Then he instructed Timothy to teach others that they might teach others, thus establishing the continuing office of pastors and teachers in the church.
4. What was God’s purpose in the establishing the church?
 - a. For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, that is providing for the instruction of pastors and teachers in the church
 - b. Giving to them the duty of edifying, that is building up, the body of Christ

2 Tim 2:2 “*The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men **who will be able to teach others also.***”

- c. See why I came to the conclusion that the survival of individual believers is tied to the church and that indeed it is a biblical truth
5. The purpose of the church is that as a corporate body we may all come to the unity of the faith - **till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God**
6. The purpose of the church is to keep individual believers sound in the faith
 - a. That as the body of believers we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine
 - b. That as a body of believers we would not be tricked into error by the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting false teacher
7. That the church might be a mature body of believers
 - a. Speaking the truth in love and become one in Christ
 - b. Christ being the head **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies.**
8. Notice here, many believers but one body
9. This is what the church is all about
 - a. This is our purpose as we serve God here in this area of God’s kingdom on earth
 - b. As believers we are one with every believer of every nation, race, or station in life
 - c. As believers we are one another here this morning
 - d. Think of the church as being made up of believers from all over the world
 - e. God has drawn together a spiritual community whose members share a common life in Christ”

CONCLUSION: Herman Bavinck, the Dutch theologian, makes the same point in his book, (*Our Reasonable Faith*)

“Christ [not only] brings the benefits of calling and regeneration, faith and repentance, justification and adoption as children, renewal and sanctification, into being in His believers on earth, [but He also] sustains and reinforces them ... He grants all [these] benefits by means of His Word and His Spirit, but ... He also grants them only in the fellowship which binds all the believers together.

He does not distribute them to single individuals, nor to a small group of persons, but He gives them out to a great multitude, to the whole of the new humanity, which was chosen in Him by the Father from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). **The believer, therefore, never stands apart by himself; he is never alone**”

10. Our Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54, teaches us in similar vein regarding the Holy Catholic Church.

That out of the **whole human race**, from the beginning to the end of the world, the Son of God, by His Spirit and Word, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself unto everlasting life a chosen communion in the unity of the true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain a living member of the same.