

Why Does the Church Exist?

What Does the Bible Teach?

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Today, as I was driving in contemplating what I was going to speak on, I was reminded of the older Christian man who went to hear a young preacher preach. And after a very enthusiastic message from that young pastor, the older man's wife asked him what he thought about the message. The older man said, "It was both original and it was good." And he paused and his wife asked him to explain what he meant by that, and he said, "The problem with that message is that what was good was not original and what was original was not good." You can think about that for a moment.

What I have to say today is not going to strike many ears as being very original and that's okay. The point of preaching is not always to try to bring something new to the table, but it's to bring something good to the table, something basic, something foundational, particularly in this series that we've been embarked on since the first of the year really. For those of you who are visiting with us here today, we have spent the past 2 to 3 months going through a series on the basic doctrines of the Bible, going through what the Bible teaches on very crucial foundational issues. So we have covered what and answered questions, "Why do we believe the Bible?" "Who is God?" "What is the Trinity?" "Who is Satan?" "Who is man?" "What is sin?" "What is salvation?" "What is the church?" And those themes have dominated our thinking and our pulpit over the past several weeks and it has been a delight to be able to be a part of that in the past several weeks.

Now, as we come today we're going to answer another very foundational question and one of the things that I would say just by way of preface and again for those of you who are visiting because there are so many of you, we're a new body of believers here. We've been doing this for maybe two years or so. So we're not willing to assume anything. We're not willing to take anything for granted because just as a contractor would not take for granted the pouring of a level solid foundation upon which he was going to build a house, so we do not want to take for granted any of the foundational basic doctrines upon which God builds his church. And that's what we've tried to do over the past couple of months.

Today were coming to a particularly important question for all of us to understand. Last time, when we spoke on this series, we answered the question, "What is the church?" And we said that the church was that group of people who have been born of the Spirit who

are true believers in Christ and who gather together in local assemblies to worship the one true God. And we answered that question and looked at that in some detail. But that leads to another question that we're going to try to answer today in very inadequate form but very foundational. Part of the problem with Christianity today, at least in America, in Western culture, is that we don't stop and take time to address and consider the foundational questions that would drive everything else. We get so consumed with trying to get seekers into the church that we don't answer basic questions that would help us understand why we do what we do.

Today I want to answer this question: why does the church exist? Why does the church exist? Why is there a group of believers gathered here together today in northern Kentucky and in the general Cincinnati area, why is it that God throughout the ages has a people that serve him here on earth? What is the purpose of that? What are we supposed to do? What is to be our motivation? What is our ambition as a church? One of the ways of framing the question in that way, one of the things that it does, it is something that we've tried to cultivate over the past several weeks, is that this kind of question helps us to think corporately. It helps us to think about the broader body of Christ and the broader purposes. The way seeker-sensitive ministries is conducted, it trains people, it conditions them to think only in terms of themselves. What is in this for me? How can this help me? How can this serve me today? And that even bleeds over if you're under that kind of ministry in teaching long enough, it makes you take a self-centered approach to the Bible itself. What does the Bible have to say to me? What does it mean to me?

Well, look, the Scriptures were written to more than just you. They were written to more than just me. It is fair to say the Scriptures were written to the people of God, and if we identify with the people of God, we need to think outside the realm of our own personal lives, our own devotions, "How can this help me get through my latest life crisis?" We need to answer more fundamental basic questions and understand why the church exists because if you have some kind of framework to understand that question, then you have a context in which to understand the details of day to day life in the church, week to week life in the church. Why is it that we devote a solid hour every week to teaching the Bible? Why is it that we sing praises to God? Why is it that we do what we do Sunday by Sunday? Well, that's all explained when you understand why the church exists.

Now that we have received God's grace, and now that we're drawn together, as it were, kind of like a center of gravity drawing us together, what is it that we are to do? I want to give four answers to that question, they are all related and they are in the sequence of priority. We'll go through these things together this morning. I'm so grateful, so grateful that God has given us, together, the privilege of opening his word together. I hope you understand, I trust you understand and I know many of you do, that to come and open the word of the living God is the most profound privilege that can be bestowed upon anyone on the face of the earth. There is nothing more valuable in the universe than the word of God. There is nothing more valuable than knowing what the Creator has said and where he has made himself known. The most important thing for us today is not what this means to me but that this hour would be devoted to the glory of God and that this would be what God wants it to be and in the process may be it will be something that will be

useful to us as well, but the purpose is always to gather together for the sake of the glory of the one who saved us. There is a sense that that puts us as individuals into perspective and when we answer the question, "Why does the church exist," it helps us understand what it is we are to be and to do.

So why does the church exist? Let me give you the first answer to that question: the church exists to exalt God. To exalt God. E-x-a-l-t. The church exists to be a reflection of the glory of God and Scripture is abundantly clear on this. When we were teaching on the church two weeks ago, we said that Christ bought the church, that he is the authority in the church, he is the head of the church. Titus 2:14 says that Christ purchased the church to be his own possession and so as the possession of Christ, as belonging to Christ, as those who are on the receiving end of the mercy and grace of Christ, then isn't it obvious, isn't it obvious that the very purpose for which we exist would be to reflect back to the one who saved us from our sins, glory and honor and thanksgiving, that having been redeemed out of sin, having been delivered from the eternal consequences of sin, having had the power of sin broken in our lives and being so grateful for the spiritual power and grace and goodness that Christ has poured out upon us, wouldn't it be obvious that if that's as important as we say it is, wouldn't it be obvious that the primary thing, the primary purpose of life is not that I get my needs satisfied or that I get to do what I want to do, the primary purpose is to give him glory.

To help you see that in Scripture, turn to Ephesians 1. We're going to look at several different passages this morning and I just want you to see how Scripture makes the exultation of God the primary focus of the church. 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether, then, you eat or drink whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." And so every detail of our life is oriented toward this purpose. Here in Ephesians 1, Paul makes it plain about the very purpose of the church. Look at Ephesians 1:4 where it says that God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Why would he do that? "Paul, why would Christ show such kindness to us? Why would God choose us? Why would he to do that?" Verse 6, here's the purpose, here's the end to which God did this, "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."

Now, it's not enough for Paul to have said that once in this passage, he says it again. Look at verse 11, he says, "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that," here is the purpose once more, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory." He says it again, "to the praise of his glory." Verse 6, "to the praise of his glory," verse 12. He said it twice. We can move onto something else now. No, wait. No, actually we can't because he goes on and repeats it for a third time. Look at verse 13, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession." Third time in seven verses, "to the praise of His glory." God called the church into existence, Christ saved a people so that they would be

vessels, individually and corporately, that the church, that group of people who believe in Christ, would exist with a purpose, understanding that their primary goal is to give glory to the one who chose them, redeemed them on the cross, and in whose hearts the Spirit worked to bring them to true salvation. That's why we exist. We exist to the praise and glory of our Savior. That is the defining purpose of the church.

Now, what does it mean to glorify God? What does it mean to exalt him? What do we mean when we say that? Well, I'm not going to try to give you a technical definition but I just want to give you some things to hang your thoughts on. We honor his character; we thank him for his work in our lives; we speak well of Christ; we obey his word. We elevate his word and we say without apology that this book, these 66 books of the Bible, this one book is inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is absolute truth, there is no other truth to be found anywhere in the universe except what God has revealed within the covers of the 66 books of the Bible.

Larry, providentially, read from Psalm 138 at the open of the service. We didn't plan it that way but in Psalm 138 it says that, "I will give thanks to your name for your loving kindness and your truth for you have magnified your word according to all your name." And so because this one true God who eternally exists in three persons has shown love and mercy and kindness toward us in redeeming us from our sins, because of the great intrinsic worth of his character, because of the perfect way that he has revealed himself in his word, and because we are so very grateful to be in union with Christ, to be on the receiving end of mercy, to have been delivered from the power of sin in one day from the very presence of sin, to be freed from the penalty of sin, we realize that we have received so much undeserved grace that the one thing, the one preeminent priority that dominates our lives, our thinking, our ambitions, our motivations is, whatever else happens to me in life, whatever else I think, whatever else I care about, the one dominating passion, the one supreme passion, must be for us as a people and for you as a redeemed Christian individually, to say that the thing that matters is that my life would be uniquely devoted to giving glory to God. That's the purpose. That's why we exist. Glorifying God is our supreme priority and there is nothing else that competes with that purpose, with that motivation. This is not about us. This church belongs to Christ, it doesn't belong to me and it doesn't belong to you, it doesn't belong to any particular group within the church. The church belongs to Christ and part of belonging to him means we exist to glorify him. By comparison, nothing else matters. Whether I live or whether I die, whether it's in sickness or in health, as long as Christ is glorified, then our purpose is fulfilled and in that we can find our satisfaction. That's why we exist. Glorifying God, exalting God, is our words supreme priority.

Now, lest you think I'm making too much of a single passage in Ephesians 1. Turn over to the gospel of Matthew 10. As you're turning there, let me just say something that is going to echo, is going to resonate with everyone in here who is truly born-again. There is a sense in which as you think about your salvation, there is a sense in which as you think about the way in the grace and the mercy that God has shown to you in life, there is a sense whether you've really recognized it or not, some of you consciously, some of you it will resonate more and you say, "You know, the one thing in life that I want to do, if I

don't get to do anything else in life, the one thing in life that I want to do is that I just want to somehow magnify and adore and give back the life breath that I have to this one who showed such grace and mercy to me. This one who loved my soul more than his own life himself." You just say, of course. To the redeemed heart, what I'm saying is basic obvious truth. There is nothing else that you would want to do. And here is what I want to see from Matthew 10 is that that supreme priority of worship, that supreme priority of giving glory to God, is what Christ said was the only kind of acceptable response to him, that there is no other competing affection for Christ that can live in the redeemed heart.

Look at Matthew 10:37 where Jesus says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." The call of the gospel, beloved, the call of the gospel, the promise of eternal life, hear me on this, the promise of eternal life is exclusively reserved for those who renounce their own life ambition, their own life affections and say, "Lord Jesus, I submit to you. I embrace you. I enthrone you as the unconditional King of my heart and there is no other who will ever have competing affection for you in my heart. And Lord if I find in my life bubbling up competing affections for you, I will repent of that," because what Christ has called us to is a supreme affection for him that transcends every other earthly desire, ambition or affection. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

So, this is kind of sobering isn't it? This makes you examine your heart. You say what is it that I love in life? What is it that motivates me? And you know, there are so many kinds of unspoken currents that go beneath the surface of what people say and think, it's hard to bring them all out and address them. But when you understand the supreme priority of Christ in your life, you realize that nothing else ultimately matters. It's not that it doesn't matter, but that in an ultimate sense compared to, this is the thing, compared to Christ, nothing else competes. You realize that there is no other affection that trumps your affection to Christ. That is the mark of the redeemed heart and so it's one of the ways that you can assess the reality of your salvation, it's one of the ways that you can assess your understanding of the gospel is to realize this one thing, is that Jesus Christ, a real living being, one who was a time in space historical man, now exalted into the throne room of heaven at the right hand of God, he who is God Incarnate, God in human flesh, that a real person comes to you in the proclamation of the word of God, comes to you in the proclamation of the gospel, and says, "I have supreme claim on your affections. Will you follow me or not?" A person, the Lord Jesus Christ, is claiming your absolute allegiance, your complete surrender to him. And the question is, have you received him on his terms? Have you submitted to him on the call that says, "I will be the supreme affection of your heart or you will not have me at all?" Have you responded to him on those terms? Have you, as it were, taken a blank check and signed it and said, "Lord Jesus, here is my life. You fill in the terms. You fill in the conditions. You fill in what happens. If you will just have me, I will follow you wherever you go. I will love you more than any other." Is that the way that you love Christ?

Turn to Matthew 22:36, a lawyer came to Jesus testing him and said, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And Jesus 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 foremost commandment." I understand, beloved, that you're like me and that you don't live out your love for Christ perfectly. I understand that you sin and fall short of the glory of God even as a believer in Christ, but that's a slightly different question than what we're talking about here. The question that we're talking about here is: is the settled allegiance of your heart to Christ and Christ alone? And have you, as it were, declared war on everything within you that would rise up in opposition to that? Do you see Christ high and lifted up, glorified, exalted and you say, "That's where my affection lies is with him." A person. This is not abstract theological theory; this is not just exegetical data from the Greek New Testament. A living person claims your supreme allegiance on the promise of eternal life, on the threat of eternal punishment if you reject him. That is the consequence of the gospel. Those are the terms upon which Christ offers himself to you and you don't get to redefine the terms and say, "Well, I want to you here but not there." I'll say it again, eternal life is exclusively reserved for those who renounce themselves and enthrone Christ as King of their hearts.

And so I ask you, have you received Christ like that? You quickly see that the terms of Christ are different from the terms of what sometimes is offered, "Hey, come down one time, say a prayer," and you go and you're all set. That's not it. That's not it at all. Christ confronts the very seat of our affections and says, "I will own you there." And the true believer says, "Of course you will. Of course you will. I wouldn't have it any other way." And as individuals gather together and come together as a corporate body of believers, they come together and, as it were, look in each other's eyes and say, "Isn't it great that we can glorify the God who saved me and who saved you? Isn't it wonderful that we can just praise and worship and honor his name together? There is nothing else I'd rather do. You too? Oh, we are in this together. Praise a holy and gracious God." Glorifying God is our supreme joy as a people. It is the call of God on our lives and it is also our supreme joy to respond with hearts of grateful obedience. So, when a believer hears that the purpose of his life and the purpose of the church is to exalt God, he responds and says, "Yes, that's what I embrace. That's what I want." Charles Spurgeon said this, "Christ has done such great things for us and he has shown so much goodwill toward us that to pay him reverence seems not so much the call of duty but as the natural impulse of love." Why does the church exist? The church exists to exalt God. The church exists to exalt Christ who saved us and everything else falls under that primary purpose.

Now, God in his word has shown us how he wants us to go about doing that as a church which leads us to the second answer to, "Why does the church exist?" First of all, the church exist to exalt God. Secondly, the church exist to edify the saints, to build up true Christians. A thought that would seem so obvious as you read Scripture but only if you only looked at what so many churches are doing today with their seeker-sensitive model of ministry, their seeker-sensitive philosophy, "Let's just get them in the walls and see what happens." You would think that this was something radical. No, it's not radical, it's biblical. The church exists to edify the saints. You see, the church is the realm in which Christians are supposed to grow spiritually and that is to be one of the primary motivating

factors in the way the church structure and church ministry is set up, that there would be a deliberate, intentional, biblical effort to make it possible for true Christians to come and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 3:18.

Turn to Ephesians again, chapter 4. What is the purpose of the church? Well, the church exists to exalt God, the church exists to edify the saints. Ephesians 4, let's start in verse 11, speaking about the church it says that, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." Why did he do that? Verse 12, "For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." The foundation of the apostles, those men who came after, pastors and teachers today are given to the church for the purpose of building up Christians so that they can live the life that Christians are supposed to live and that they would carry out what Christ has appointed them to do in the power of the Spirit to the glory of God. Verse 12, "to the building up of the body of Christ," verse 13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Verse 14, "As a result, we are no long to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of man, by craftiness and deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him," here it is again, the focus is on "the one who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." We're not to be children but we're to become spiritual men, as it were. We're not to stay babes but we're to grow. To grow. To grow. There is to be a development among those who belong to the church and part of the reason that the church exists is to teach and to minister in a way that people go from being immature Christians and to grow and to go down that path toward maturity. That's part of the reason why the standards for spiritual leadership are so high. Why you don't appoint a new convert into spiritual leadership. You need, the Scripture calls for men who have grown and who have experienced some growth in their own Christian lives before they are ever set up as examples or leaders in the church.

Spiritual growth, and let me save this as we talk about spiritual growth, it's so important to define terms. Those of you who aspire to teach at different points, it reminds me, when I was teaching my very, very first messages many years ago, an older man who is now with the Lord came to me and said, "Whatever else you do in your teaching, explain your terms. Define your terms so that people will know what you're talking about." Those of you who aspire to teach, you need to explain your terms. What do we mean, therefore, when we say spiritual growth? What do we mean when we talk about edification and the church is designed to promote the spiritual growth of the saints? Well, spiritual growth is not merely the addition of biblical knowledge to your head, spiritual growth is shown in a character that is transformed by the holy influence of the Spirit of God upon their lives and by growing in obedience to the word of God.

Look at Ephesians 5:1, remember that Paul had talked about in chapter 4 he had talked about the priority of spiritual growth. What does he flow into as he talks about that? Well,

we're skipping over so much just for the sake of time, but in Ephesians 5:1, you can see that there is an emphasis on sanctified character, that we are to change morally, that we are to progressively grow away from sin and darkness and toward obedience, holiness, and light and understanding. So in Ephesians 5:1, what does edification look like? Well, we're just picking one passage out of the whole New Testament epistles. The New Testament epistles are about this kind of edification but in Ephesians 5:1, Paul says, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. But," here we go, "immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." That's a mouthful but let's not read it too quickly. Edification, spiritual growth, life in the church is designed and we're just kind of using these five verses from Ephesians 5 as an illustration as much as anything, the effect of life in the church should be that there is a progressive diminishment of these kinds of traits in the lives of those who gather together to worship in a true church. Verse 3, immorality, impurity, greed, there is a dying off of the remnants of those kinds of sin. Down in verse 18, he says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." And so there is just this crud, to use a technical theological term, this crud of earthly life the spiritual remnants of sin in your heart are increasingly put away and replaced by things which are fitting for those who name the name of Christ. Look at verse 4, Ephesians 5, verse 4, no filthiness no silly talk, no coarse jesting. It's not just the conduct of your body, it's what comes out of your mouth, it's what animates the affections of your heart. Those things get put away. Those things you set aside. You set aside drunkenness. You set aside silly talk. You set aside immorality and impurity. And instead, you consciously pursue, conscious of the great God who saved you, conscious of your desire to exalt the one who saved you, verse 4, instead there is giving of thanks. There is an increasingly grateful spirit that marks those who are growing spiritually. There is a separation from worldliness and being set aside to the love and affections of a true Christian.

So look at your life, beloved, you can't talk about the purpose of the church without looking at the lives of the members who constitute the church. Look at your life, beloved. Is there immorality? Impurity? Is there greed? Is there silly talk that marks your life? Are those the kinds of characteristics that you're known for among your family and your circle of acquaintances? Are you known for a crass, relatively indifferent approach to spiritual life? Are you so preoccupied with the things of the world that you hardly have time for the things of Scripture? Well, beloved, if that's you, let this word from Scripture be that which motivates you to change. Let this be a crossroads where you say, "You know what? I've lost sight of this. I see it in God's word and I want to repent, Lord, I want to come to you and I recognize. I feel the convicting power of your Spirit upon my heart and I want to repent as an expression of the true fruit of my true repentance. Thank you for awakening," you say to God, "thank you for awakening in my mind a sense that I'm

too worldly, I'm too lustful, I'm too prone to immorality, I'm too prone to drunkenness, Lord, I've got to turn from that." A true Christian welcomes the reproof of the word.

Beloved, here's the thing: it's not just setting that stuff aside and saying words that are going to convict my own heart, are you marked by the giving of thanks? It's not just that we stopped doing the bad stuff. God is positively calling us to be people who express gratitude, who walk about with a thankful heart that look past the momentary transient nature of this life and recognizes the saving intentions of God on my heart and says, "God, I'm so grateful that you included me in your plan. Thank you for what I have and for what I don't have. Thank you that you withheld it because if you withheld it, it's probably something that's wise also." God gives in his grace, beloved, and understand this, this will help cultivate a grateful heart and when you understand that just as God gives in his grace he also withholds in his grace and if there are things that you have aspired after in life that you have not been able to attain, if there have been disappointments because your goals were not met, understand you think about those things biblically and you realize that what God gives is out of his grace and what he withholds is out of his grace as well and you trust him for both and you give him thanks for both.

This purpose of the church totally affects the way we look at everything, doesn't it? So you see, beloved, when we talk about why the church exists, the church exists to exalt God, the church exists to edify the saints, here is what I want you to see: life in the church is about so much more than being here Sunday morning at 9 am. That's a crucial part of it, but life in the church, the reason that the church exists is that 24/7 168 hours a week, we would be people who are being increasingly transformed, progressively sanctified to be more like what Scripture calls us to be, to more reflect the character of the one who saved us. A biblical understanding of the church totally revolutionizes the way you think about life because you start to understand that it concerns not only Sunday morning, it concerns who you are and who you are becoming and the church exists to teach, to love one another, to help us all in the progress of moving along that path that God has appointed for everyone who truly knows Christ. We meet together in part to help each other pursue those lofty spiritual goals.

Turn to Hebrews 10:23. Why is the church exist? "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." You want one mark among others of a healthily church? It's when people come together in that body and they're coming in with a mindset not so much, "What am I going to get out of it here this morning," rather coming with a mind, "How can I be a blessing and an encouragement to the persons that I run into. How can I help them in their life find the path that leads to encouragement and love and good deeds?" And when a seeker-sensitive model of ministry is adopted and you say we are going to do it the way you want it to be, what you do is you attract, you can attract a whole lot of people that way, but what you attract is a whole bunch of selfish people looking for what they can get out of it. The purpose of the church is the exact opposite of that. We come together

wanting to be conscious of how we can stimulate one another to good deeds, to how we can be an encouragement to each other. There is an outward focus to the true church which has a dampening effect on criticism and on divisive attitudes and behavior and says, "I'm here for everybody else." And in the grace of God, as we adopt that attitude, then he pours out the blessing that we need. We receive that as a secondary side benefit to pursuing the primary purpose of exalting God and edifying the saints as the corporate body. That's why we exist. Vertically, for him, horizontally for the saints.

Thirdly, the church exists to evangelize the lost. The church exists to evangelize the lost. We won't spend much time here for the sake of time. We have a mission beyond our walls. This doesn't define what we do on Sunday morning, it affects why we go out into the world afterwards. We exist to testify to the world about Jesus Christ. Look at Matthew 28:18, "Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" All authority given to me in heaven and on earth. Verse 19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and in the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age." The purpose of the church and we all have different ways and different contributions that we make to this purpose in the various spheres of life that the Lord has given to us in his providence, but another purpose of the church is that we would go out and proclaim Christ so that other people would come to know his glorious name, that other people would come in through the proclamation of our words, through the testimony of our lives, through pointing people to Scriptures that others would come to be disciples of Christ.

Two things about that: one is that this totally revolutionizes a perspective on the church that gets overtly political. Our mission field isn't like-minded conservative Republicans. Our mission field is the nations, those who share our political philosophy but yet are lost, those who oppose our political philosophy and yet are lost. Those political matters become utterly secondary to this great command to go and make disciples. Do you realize that none of us were worthy to receive the gospel? You and I were never worthy to hear it? Do you realize how fully your sinful life before Christ disqualified you from any claim on the grace of God? And then God had mercy on you? When you cried out for salvation, when you came and said, "I'm a sinner, please receive me. Please forgive me. Please fulfill your promise of eternal life," and God did that. Don't you understand that you contributed nothing to deserve that? Well, look, as you move along in your Christian life, don't ever lose sight of where you came from so that you never lose sight of the fact that the people that are outside are just like you were and you overlook secondary differences like political philosophies and skin color and sexual orientation and say, "They are a lost sinner just like I was and I need to share the gospel with them and if I get an opportunity to do so, I will overlook everything else for the one supreme purpose of obeying Christ and teaching them what Christ commanded."

Truth Community is not going to be a politically active church because that dilutes and distorts and diverts a congregation from its focus on the gospel. Every sinner out there of the most base kind and those who trained their sights to undermine us, we look past all of that if perhaps God would use our words, our teachings, our lives to be an instrument in

which he conveys saving grace to them and they are rescued from sin just like you and I were. That's why we exist. And we have to come to grips with the fact that worldly ambitions sooner or later usually sooner, and not as soon as you recognize, worldly ambitions start to undermine the purpose of the Great Commission if you're not careful.

You see, our purpose is evangelism. We exist to testify to the world about Christ and just like, beloved, just like Christ endured the reviling of his name while he was here on earth, just as Christ endured unjust suffering on a cross, just as he submitted to an unjust trial and execution out of grace for his people, so we in like manner endure mistreatment, insults, compromises of our liberty, if only we can speak the gospel. That's all that matters. Would you really, would you really, would you really - this will help you understand the priority of the gospel in your life, in your heart - would you really want to prevail in a political argument if you knew that the cost of that was that someone would turn away from Christ as a result of it? Are your politics that important to you? That you prefer your politics to the eternal well-being of the soul created in the image of God that is standing right before you? Where are our priorities? We have to come back. Christ said "Go and make disciples of all the nations. Teach them to observe all that I commanded you," and if they spit on us and they us in the process, we'll still keep doing what we're doing because our purpose is to exalt God. We exalt him in part through our obedience and he said, "Go and teach them." "Okay, Lord, I'm going." This defines priorities for us.

Well, how do we accomplish this exaltation, edification, and evangelism? Final point this morning, 4: the church uses spiritual means. The church uses spiritual means. We teach the word of God. 2 Timothy 3. Imagine having a really high-powered sports car and you disconnected the fuel line so that it wouldn't operate. Why would you do that? You just defeated the purpose of the car. Well, when we think about the purpose of the church, what we have to understand, what we have to remember is that our sole power is found in this book. It's found in the word of God not in our clever ministries, not in our direct mail programs that promise really good coffee if you'll just come and be with us. If it sounds like I'm mocking something, I am. I'm mocking a foolish approach to ministry. 2 Timothy 3:14, "You, however," actually look at verse 13, "Evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Timothy, the environment is going to get worse," and we can look at that in our present context and say, "Wow, it looks that way to us too, it's getting worse. It's getting increasingly hostile." They want to silence Christians. They are deceived, they're being deceived. So much of the deception is going on in the very church so what do we do? We panic. No, don't do that.

Verse 14, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work." The church uses spiritual means. It is the Scriptures alone that give the knowledge and the power that leads to salvation which is in Jesus Christ. When pastors close their Bible and start telling their stories, they are closing people off from the only thing that can save them, the only thing that can awaken

their hearts. Their cute little stories about their cute little kids aren't going to do anybody any good on the day of judgment. Shame on them. Shame on them for exalting themselves instead of Christ. Shame on them for proclaiming themselves when sinners who are dying are in front of them who need to hear the life-giving gospel. Shame on them. It's the Scriptures that give the knowledge which leads to salvation. That's why we teach the Bible.

Paul goes on in chapter 4:1, I think it's unfortunate that there's a chapter break there because what follows is directly tied to what is said at the end of chapter 3. Chapter 4, verse 1 he said, "All Scripture is inspired by God, it's profitable so, Timothy," look at this, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." Whoa, do you realize in light of everything that we've said here this morning that when we gather together as a church, when we exist as a body of believers together, that the purpose of the church is of great momentous eternal consequence. This isn't a joke. This isn't something to be treated lightly. The purpose of the church is significant. It is of eternal consequence. God chose us before the foundation of the world. Paul charges us in the presence of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, the ramifications of church ministry will echo throughout all of eternity. This is serious. This matters. That's why we don't put clowns up here on stage. That's why we are not trying to do interpretive dance. This is too important to trivialize it.

What did Paul say after he made this solemn charge and invoked the presence of God, the son of God and evoked eternal judgment as his witness? "Timothy, I charge you in light of all of this." I'd better pay attention here, verse 2, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season," whether people want to hear it or whether they don't, "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patient and instruction." Timothy, preach the word because, verse 3, "the time will come when they won't endure sound doctrine; wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." Does that describe American culture today or not? Well, don't you see? Don't you see that that reality that we all read about and see in the news and see happening all around us, that's not for us to become militant and hostile against those who are propagating it with a hateful spirit. It's not for us to retreat into isolation. It's not for us to fall back in fear. No, no, that's not it at all. That's not what we do at all. We embrace the fact that God has appointed us for such a time as this and we say this is the divinely appointed time in history where God has brought us together and we will simply band together and we'll preach the word and we'll let God worry about the consequences of it. We preach the word. We're not afraid. Why would I be afraid of anything? I'm going to heaven. Christ has saved me and put his hand upon me. Why would I fear the loss of earthly things? Not that I'm looking for for that. Not that I'm asking for that but I'm not living for this world. Neither are you if you're a Christian.

So we just have to have the perspective and what defines the perspective is understanding why the church exists. We exist to glorify God, to edify the saints, to evangelize the lost and how do we do that? We use spiritual means. We teach the word. We have nothing to

say except what's in the four corners of the Bible. And yet Scripture says that's more than enough. God will honor us. One way or another God will honor those who honor his word. So in verse 5 there of 2 Timothy, chapter 4, Paul says, "Timothy, you be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

We use spiritual means, not fleshly means. As we do that, we observe the importance of the church, baptism, communion, which are part of what the Lord has appointed to be an ongoing testimony. We use our spiritual gifts to minister to one another. We don't exist to please the world, we exist to evangelize it. We don't exist to get comfortable in the world, we exist to honor the God who saved us out of the world. And Scripture says don't be surprised if the world hates you, of course, they're going to hate you. They hated Christ and crucified him. Nothing has changed in the intervening 2000 years. If we're Christians, we're going to be on the receiving end of hostility. And so knowing that makes us bold. Knowing that makes us courageous. Knowing that makes us thankful. Knowing that makes us want to come together and honor the purpose for which God saved us.

Closing with Charles Spurgeon, he said and I quote, "The church is not formed to be a social club, a political association or to promote its own opinions, it is a body created of the Lord to accomplish his own ends and purposes and it exists for nothing else." I don't know about you, beloved, but for Christ to of called me out of the world to be a part of that purpose is so marvelous, it's so wonderful. If I could go back I never would and I know that most of you wouldn't either. What strengthens us in that resolve is understanding the purpose of the church and loving each other enough to come together to serve the purposes of Christ together for as long as he gives us breath. And if are ignored and isolated and marginalized, that's okay because do you know what's going to happen in heaven? All of that ignoring and marginalization is going to be reversed as Christ displays his manifold glory on those who have been the objects of his affection. We get to live for Christ today. We get to live with him throughout all eternity. We are a church triumphant. We are a church optimistic. We are a church committed to the purpose for which God has appointed us. And I am grateful to God that there are so many sweet, tender hearted people together who share in that same great affection. It's a mark of the work of God in your heart individually. It's a mark of the work of God in our church and we praise him for that.

Please bow with me in prayer.

Father, give us joy and equip us to move forward in the fulfillment of these great purposes. Make us individually and corporately a people that exalts you, a people that edify other Christians, a people that evangelize the lost without rancor and without resentment. And Father, help us to use the spiritual means that you have appointed: your word, your church. And, Father, as we sung earlier, we don't have the power in our own strength to do any of this so while we recognize your purposes and we commit ourselves corporately to them, Father, we ask for the great, wise, omnipotent, empowering work of the Holy Spirit upon us in our lives and in our corporate testimony so that we would fulfill these things in the energy, the power and the grace and strength of your Spirit. Not

in our flesh. Not according to human wisdom, but in humble trust and dependence upon you. We ask you to take us and the people you have called into this place at this time, take us, O God, and use us to your glory. Father, we ask again for those who are here who do not know Christ, may the lofty purposes of your church convict them of the sinful shallowness of their lives and motivate them, energize them, cause them to flee to Christ for eternal salvation. We don't want to leave anyone behind, Lord, we ask you to look on each heart and save them according to your will and it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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