

CHURCH - ROLE OF “the proper working of each part”

Key question

What is the role of the church in the world?

Key text

Ephesians 4:10-16

“¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the **body of Christ**; 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. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which 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.”

Introduction

1. How are we to understand the church’s core purpose? Does it exist to evangelize the world or to enhance it? Does the church exist primarily to worship God or edify humanity? Does the church exist to continue a heritage or challenge it? Is the church to focus on mission or maintenance?
 2. The place of the church in the world is an issue of considerable confusion for the church as a whole. Liberal churches and some conservative churches (Reconstructionist) see the church as closely aligned with society at large. See notes on church and missions and church and society.
 - a. Liberal groups might tend to see the church as a chaplain to the secular culture.
 - b. Reconstructionists would see the church as a radical element of revolution in the broader culture, demanding conformity to Biblical Law.
 3. Evangelical churches tend to respect a separation between church and state but with differing nuances.
- A. **The function of the church.**

1. There are three competing emphases in the evangelical tradition of the local church. Each emphasis will generate different priorities, questions, and responses to the issues of ministry and community life.

| <i>The great commandment</i> | <i>The great commission</i> | <i>The great commitment</i> |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Love of God and neighbor as self | Go into all the world and make disciples | By faith you are saved through grace |
| Matthew 22:36-40 | Matthew 28:19-20 | Eph.2:8-10 |
| A worshipping community | Winning and building disciples | Trust and obey |
| Modality | Sodality | Individuality |
| Message centered | Mission centered | Faith centered |

2. The emphasis of the New Testament epistles seems to favor a model that embraces the great commandment (a worshipping community of love) over the great commission (winning the world to faith in Christ) as the core function of the church. The great commission is a necessary step in realizing the vision of the great commandment.
3. We may also speak of “the great congregation” which is a view of the church that centers attention on the exclusiveness and distinctiveness of the faith community. This can have a rather negative image (country club, corporation, etc.) if it is not properly understood. Note that “Gifts of the Spirit” are given to equip the believer for ministry and are specifically designated to “edify the Body” not reform or win the world (I Cor.12).

B. The great commission examined.

1. The great commission in the gospels.
 - **Matt.28:19-20** “19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
 - **Lk.24:46-49** “46 --- Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 you are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”
 - **Jn.20:21-23** “21 --- Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ 23 ‘If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.’”
 - **Mk.16:15-18** “15 --- Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 He who has believed and has been baptized will be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

- **John 10:16** “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.”

2. The great commission in Acts. **Acts 2**

| Events of Acts 2 | Styles of ministry | Longings of people | Purpose of the church |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|---|
| vs.43 “a sense of awe” | Reaching UP | Transcendence | Exalt Christ as Creator, Redeemer, Lord |
| vs.42 “the teaching of the Apostles” | Reaching DOWN | Insight | Educate Christ’s people |
| vs.42 “fellowship” | Reaching IN | Intimacy | Edify Christ’s church |
| vs.47 “adding to their number daily” | Reaching OUT | Direction | Evangelize Christ’s world |
| vs.42 “breaking of bread” | Reaching BACK | Stability | Embrace Christ’s heritage |
| vs.47 “having favor with all people” | Reaching FORWARD | Utopia | Enrich the culture |

3. The great commission in the epistles. **Eph.4:10-16**

- The goal of the great commission is the building of the body of Christ to maturity.
 - The building process starts with evangelism and ends with maturity and unity of all believers in community.
 - Individual roles and responsibilities vary depending on the spiritual gifts of the individuals.
 - Gifted leaders are to equip all believers for service in the areas of their giftedness.
- As “the body of Christ” the Church’s mission is most simply stated as responding to Christ.
 - Motivated by His love
 - Empowered by His Spirit
 - Guided by His Word
 - This response should involve the **gathering** of believers together (Acts 2) and the **scattering** of believers into the world (Acts 8) for influence and witness.
 - The response should respect the complete spectrum of response and not just major on one aspect or part of the whole purpose. For example, the church does not exist primarily to evangelize, or enrich, or exalt. It exists to carry out all aspects of its response to Jesus.
 - The relationship of Israel (the Jews) to the Gentiles is a major part of what God is doing in the church. **Rom. 9-11** is a key passage on this subject.

- a. God's plan is to reconcile both Jew and Gentile together in the church. This suggests that the church is to be the place where all worldly distinctions are secondary to the oneness we have in Christ.
- b. God plans to use the church to make the Jewish people jealous and thus win them to faith.
- c. The church should be aware of the significant role it plays in bringing differing people together.

C. **Purposes, Principles, Programs**

1. **Purposes** of the local Church:

- a. In God's plan for bringing glory to Himself and advancing His Kingdom, each believer should be related to a local Church because. . . the local Church is supernaturally designed as God's vehicle to bring glory to Himself through:
 1. Exalting Christ as Creator, Redeemer, & Lord — Eph.2:17-22
 2. Exemplifying the values of God's Kingdom — I Thess.1:1-4
 3. Edifying the saints — Eph. 4:11-16
 4. Evangelizing the world — Acts 1:6-9 (Matt.28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23)
 5. Enhancing the culture -
 6. Embracing our heritage -
- b. For a description and critique of the Emergent Missional Church go to file #109.

2. **Principles** designed to insure that the purposes of the local Church are fulfilled:

- a. The members must interact about their common faith. Acts 2:42
 1. Orthodoxy — confession
 2. Orthopraxy — conduct
- b. The Word of God and the gifts of the Spirit must be understood and operative — I Peter 4:11; Acts 2:42-47
 1. Some gifts minister to the gathered body (speaking).
 2. Some gifts minister within the body (service).
 3. Some gifts minister outside the body (evangelism).
- c. Corporate worship and prayer must be an integral part of its life — Acts 2:42,47

3. **Programs** in the local Church should facilitate and not frustrate the principles.

- a. A wide variety of programs can be used to aid the Church in functioning according to the above principles.
- b. All programs, policies, and procedures in the local Church should reflect a sensitivity to:
 1. The Scriptural mandates and principles.
 2. The historical roots of the Church.

D. **The Measure of a Church** (Note: See Gene Getz' book by this same title for more information.)

1. Any evaluation of the local church must be sensitive to:
 - a. The nature and purpose of the church.
 - b. The Biblical materials addressing (directly or indirectly) the church's condition.
2. There are many misconceptions about normal church life that need to be corrected.

- a. The early church was far from ideal in its understanding and practice.
 1. The New Testament epistles were written for the most part to correct problems in the churches.
 2. The “ideal” reflected in Apostolic teaching was not always practiced in the local churches.
- b. Our evaluation of the church as an institution will tend to reflect our evaluation of other institutions in our culture.
 1. Modern American churches look very much like our free-enterprise small businesses — franchised religion, competing for a share of the spiritual consumer’s market, concerned about growth, advertising, bottom line, services rendered, and etc.
 2. How does our culture identify a healthy church?
 - a. **Alive & Active** — 60 programs and just as many meetings, worship services are used to recruit for and support the programs.
 - b. **Growing** — in numbers and commitment and buildings and staff and outreach.
 - c. **Giving** — large budget (per capita), missions emphasis.
 - d. **Soul-winning** — regular conversions and baptisms, people sharing their faith.
 - e. **Missionary-minded** — 50% of budget and 10% of congregation sent into ministry.
 - f. **Smooth-running** — model of management efficiency.
 - g. **Spirit-filled** — all gifts operative, people in Word of God.
 - h. **Culturally mixed** — black and white
 - i. **Big** — (Note: 50% are 75 or less, 85% are 150 or less).
 - c. Confusing means with ends. Preaching the Bible and administering the sacraments are means not ends.
 - d. Using the particular strength of “our” church as the test of other churches.
 - e. Using superficial measurable fruit as the criteria. Usually numerical growth.
3. We can learn much about the Apostles criteria for measuring the health of a local church by noting what they applaud and rebuke in their letters. I Thess.1:2-3 is a good example.
 - a. Paul’s pattern was to address a church in terms of the congregation not the clergy.
 1. The focus of ministry was to be centered in the laity not the shepherds.
 2. In Eph.4:11-16, Paul explains the proper role of key leaders in the church.
 3. In I Cor.12:4-7, Paul outlines the pattern of ministry among the laity of the local church.
 - b. There is little if any attention given to formal program development and evaluation in Paul’s letter.
 1. The work of the ministry was to focus upon a lifestyle of enlightened service out of a heart of faith, hope, and love.
 2. There is nothing inherently wrong with programs per se. We must recognize that they do not in and of themselves constitute an authentic expression of healthy ministry.
4. To appreciate the meaning of faith, hope, and love we need to appreciate the natural impulse of every local congregation.
 - a. Much of what we do is motivated by fear — fear of being alienated, rejected, losing control, etc.

- b. Because there are many things we can't control that threaten our happiness (people, circumstances, and even God), we can feel powerless. This can lead to a sense of hopelessness where we expect bad things to happen to us.
- c. All of this can lead to a selfishness where we withdraw or become defensive or blame others, or develop a "look out for #1" attitude.
- d. This scenario is illustrated in the first chapters of Genesis:
 - 1. Adam and Eve hide from God out of fear (3:10).
 - 2. They then blame others for their problems (3:12).
- e. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a radical call to faith, hope, and love whereby the impulse of fear, despair, and selfishness are reversed.
 - 1. **Faith** — involves the freedom to risk without the fear that so often causes us to shrink back and hide.
 - 2. **Hope** — involves the willingness to suffer in the present with an expectation that glory will follow — an unnatural positive attitude.
 - 3. **Love** — involves the personal security to sacrificially give to others and accept them as they are.

5. Summary

- a. The following chart may help us discern what faith, hope, and love will look like in critical areas of ministry.

The Measure of a Church

| | Love | Hope | Faith |
|--|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Exemplify the values of God's Kingdom. | In, but not of the world I Jn.2:15-17 | Striving for true holiness I Jn.3:3 | Dead to self Gal.2:20 |
| Exalt Christ as Creator, Redeemer, and Lord | Thankfulness Col.3:12-17 | Christ centered joy Rom.5:2, 15:13 | Prayer Heb.10:19-22 |
| Edify the Body of Believers | Unity (confront & confirm) Rom.12:10 | Perseverance I Thess.1:3,6,7 | Action Jas.2:14-26 |
| Equip the Saints for Ministry | Using gifts to meet needs Rom.12 | Be able to give an account of I Pet.3:15 | Expecting God to use us I Pet.4:11 |
| Evangelize the World | Compassion for lost II Cor.5:14 | Confidence II Cor.3:12 | Speaking out II Cor.4:13 |
| Embrace its heritage | Respecting those who have gone before us. | Share a common hope. | Share a common faith. |
| Enhance the culture | Show love for all. | Inspire hope | Inspire faith |

- b. A healthy local church is going to have an active ministry that is spontaneous, lay-centered, diverse, and reflective of genuine faith, hope, and love growing out of orthodox understanding of God and His Kingdom.

E. The Vision and Values of a local church.

The Purpose of the church is

To **glorify** God
 by **responding** to the Scriptures
 and **cooperating** with the Spirit
in the formation and maintenance of
 an authentic Christian **community**
that is characterized by
 intimate **communion** with Jesus Christ,
 practical **caring** for one another,
 and sensitive **communication** of the gospel to the world.

The Vision (mission) is

- to experience authentic Christian community; (so as to be an example in the world)

- We want to cultivate loving relationships that bind us to each other and to Christ.
- We want to respect the full diversity of Christ's body while maintaining the boundaries of fellowship set by the apostles.
- We want to integrate Christian values into all of life with integrity.

- to engage the environment in which we live; (so as to win a hearing for the gospel)

- We want to respect the value and strengths of this unique community.
- We want to be sensitive to the special issues that an educated community raises.
- We want to cultivate an open learning environment.
- We recognize the unique opportunity to minister to future leaders from all over the world who are with us during the formative years of their lives.

- to equip those in our fellowship for a lifetime of worship and ministry. (so as to liberate people to live)

- We want to build Christian character in individuals and families.
- We want to give individuals a vision for service and for the church.
- We want to equip people through hands on experience to minister wherever they may be.

The Core Values include

the integration of the grace and truth of the Christian gospel

(We are not going to sacrifice one for the other.)

through a liberal learning style,

(We are not closed minded.)

a radical life style,

(We are not superficial.)

and a gracious ministry style.

(We are not legalistic.)

F. The “Missional” church.

1. A recent emphasis on “returning” to a “missional” or purpose driven church addresses the unfortunate “maintenance” mode that has come to characterize many modern congregations.
2. The purpose of the “mission driven” church is to reflect the incarnate presence of God in Jesus to the world – carrying out his purposes, reflecting his heart, and glorifying his Father.
3. Some characteristics of a missional church. (from *Shaped by God’s Heart – The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* by Milfred Minatrea)
 - a. A high threshold of Membership – expect members to minister.
 - b. Be real, not real religious – make authenticity a mandate.
 - c. Teach to obey rather than to know – be action oriented.
 - d. Rewrite worship every week – sing a new song and keep the language of the soul relevant and fresh.
 - e. Live apostolically – as ambassadors of the Kingdom of Christ sent into the world.
 - f. Expect to change the world – get serious about making a difference.
 - g. Order actions according to purpose – be efficient.
 - h. Measure growth by capacity to release, not retain – reproduce active disciples not spectators.
 - i. Place Kingdom concerns first – be salt and light to and in the world.
4. While this missional emphasis is welcomed as a needed corrective of much of what characterizes the modern church, it is not without its dangers.
 - a. When one reads the letters of the New Testament (which we assume reflected the emphasis of the Apostle’s understanding of purpose) a picture emerges that is somewhat different and broader than the “missional church” emphasis.
 - b. The church is to be missional if by missional we mean that the church is to respond to Christ in creating and sustaining an authentic community of faith that reflects the values of the Kingdom in a world that does not share those values.
 - c. Much of the church’s mission is to be directed to building the Body of Christ as a distinct community of salt and light in the world. This is not to be understood as maintenance of a spiritual country club, the building of a big organization, or the establishment of a “fortress” mentality of withdrawal from the world. It is rather to be viewed as a new (alternative) family of faith that restores the fuller image of God to

- social relationships, responses to sin and suffering, and renewal of the dignity of all people.
- d. For more information on the relationship of the church to society see theology file #806,808,809.
5. While correcting the errors of the “maintenance” oriented congregation, the “missional” church must be careful not to create its own errors.
 - a. It must be careful to not make the mistake of defining authentic (justification) by action rather than faith.
 - b. It must be careful to not be so “relevant” to the world that it loses some of the “offense” of the Gospel.
 - c. It must be careful to not see “knowing” as a hindrance, competitor, and threat to “doing.”
 - d. It must not confuse authentic worship with creative change.
 - e. It must be careful to reflect the Apostle’s teaching “emphasis” and not just the idea of their “sent into the world” calling.
 - f. It must not be unrealistic in its expectations of how and how much this world will be changed before Christ’s return.
 - g. It must be careful to not let the ends justify the means.
 - h. It must be careful to not embrace the Kingdom without the King.

G. Seven habits of highly effective churches.

1. The effective church majors on **majors and minors** on minors. The first thing is to keep the first thing the first thing.
2. The effective church is a **community** with boundaries that are big enough for the whole body of Christ but no bigger. The church is a community for all spiritual sheep but not goats.
3. The effective church knows and respects both the **mind and heart** of Christ. The best decisions are made with a sound mind and implemented with a passionate heart.
4. The effective church **integrates** faith and values into all of life. It is an inside-out community.
5. The effective church **shows and tells** the good news to the world. It leads by example and tells its story with sensitivity and power.
6. The effective church creates an environment for the **healing** of souls. It is a place for confused, broken, and hurting sinners who hunger for security, significance, and serenity.
7. The effective church ministers both **grace and truth**. It is a safe place to face reality.

H. The Biblical and the Worldly church compared.

Col.3:2a

“set your mind on things above”

Col.3:2b

“not on the things that are on the earth”

The church’s calling

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Respond to Christ</p> <p>Man is created in “the image of god”</p> <p>Three pictures of the church in Ephesians: “bride” 5:22-32, “building”</p> | <p>Respond to the world’s agenda or selfish wishes.</p> <p>React to past traditions or to personal offenses.</p> |
|--|--|

| | |
|---|------------------|
| 2:19-22, "body" 4:11-16 Represent the Kingdom of God in the world. | Reflect this age |
|---|------------------|

The purposes of the kingdom vs. The ways of the world

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|--|---|
| Exemplify kingdom values Exalt Christ Edify the saints Equip individuals Evangelize the world Embrace its heritage Enhance the culture | Exemplify the world's values Exalt man Exploit people to reach goals Concentrate on professionals Promote ethics without Christ Ignore its history Withdraw from or corrupt the culture |
|--|---|

The church's principles vs. The ways of the world

| | |
|---|---|
| Purity Doctrine Values - motives Attitudes Relationships Conducts Faith and prayer Hope Love Grace Obedience before gifts Faithfulness and discipline Unity with diversity Communal spirit and loyalty The cross before the crown Humility and weakness Honesty | A mixture of the Kingdom of God and the "leaven of this age" The wisdom of this age A defensive and negative posture Utilitarianism Conditional relationships Gifts before obedience Irresponsibility Diversity with division; unity through conformity Individualism The crown without the cross Pride and power Manipulation |
|---|---|

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. Where do we find the great commission in each of the gospels?
- b. What is the great commission?
- c. Where does Paul talk about the great commission?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. What are the characteristics of a healthy church?
- b. How would you describe the purpose of the church in the world?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. In what sense are the New Testament congregations good and bad models for the church today?
- b. How would you describe the purpose of the church in the world?