

The Purpose of the Church

Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18) and the Great Commission makes it clear that He intended to do this through His personally-trained, hand-picked apostles—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19-20).

What, if anything, do the apostles say in Scripture about Christ’s purpose for building His church? Here are some suggestions for your consideration:

1. **To uphold and display God’s truth to the world** - “I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed , I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, ***which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth*** (1 Timothy 3:15).
2. **To reveal God’s wisdom (God’s truth applied)**- “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; ***in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church*** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:8-11).
3. **To nurture spiritual unity and maturity in all Christians** - “And He gave some as apostles...prophets...evangelists...pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, ***to the building up of the body of Christ; 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...*** speaking the truth in love, ***we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,*** 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***” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

How can the church achieve Christ’s purpose for her? By fulfilling the mission Christ gave her through His personally-trained, hand-picked apostles: see the other side for details.

The Mission of the Church

The apostles were faithful to the commission Christ gave them to “teach us to observe all that He commanded them” (Matthew 28:20). The instruction, principles, and patterns they passed on to us in the writings of the New Testament constitute our mission as the church.

Mark

9:50 – be at peace with one another

John

13:14 – you also ought to wash one another’s feet

13:34 – love one another, even as I have loved you

15:12 – love one another, even as I have loved you

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15:17 – love one another

Romans

12:10 – be devoted to one another in brotherly love and give preference to one another in honor

12:16 – be of one mind toward one another

13:8 – owe only love to one another

14:13 – don't judge one another

14:19 – pursue that which makes for peace and the building up of one another

15:5 – be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus

15:7 – accept one another as Christ accepted us

15:14 – admonish one another

16:16 – greet one another in love

1 Corinthians

1:10 – agree with one another without division

6:1-8 – don't have lawsuits against one another

11:33 – wait for one another when you come together to eat (the Lord's supper)

12:25 – care for one another

Galatians

5:13 – serve one another in love

5:15 – don't bite, devour, or consume one another

5:26 – don't be boastful, challenging and envying one another

6:2 – bear one another's burdens

6:10 – do good to all people, especially those in the household of the faith

Ephesians

4:2 – be humble, gentle and patient, showing forbearance to one another in love

4:25 – speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another

4:29 – build each other up

4:32 – be kind and tender-hearted to one another, forgiving one another

5:19 – speak spiritual encouragement to one another

5:21 – be subject to one another in the fear of Christ

Philippians

4:2 – agree with each other in the Lord

Colossians

3:9 – don't lie to one another

3:13 – bear with one another, forgive one another

3:16 – speak spiritual guidance to one another

1 Thessalonians

3:12 – increase and abound in love for one another, and everyone else

4:9-10 – excel at loving one another

4:18 – comfort one another

5:11 – encourage and edify one another

5:13 – live in peace with one another

5:15 – seek after that which is good for one another, and everyone else

2 Thessalonians

1:3 – have a growing love toward one another

Hebrews

3:13 – encourage one another daily

10:24-25 – spur one another on toward love and good deeds, and encourage one another

13:1 – love one another as brothers

James

4:11 – don't speak against one another

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5:9 – don't complain against one another

5:16 – confess sins to one another and pray for one another

1 Peter

1:22 – fervently love one another from the heart

2:17 – love the brotherhood of believers

3:8 – live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble

4:8-10 – be fervent in love for one another, be hospitable to and serve one another

5:5 – be humble toward one another

1 John

1:7 – fellowship with one another

3:11, 23 – love one another

4:7-21 – love one another

2 John

1:5 – love one another

While this list is not exhaustive, all of this “one-anothering” we are instructed to do is the fulfillment of what Christ meant when He washed the disciple’s feet (John 13:1-17). If we are saved, then we have “bathed” and the rest of our body is clean--only our feet need to be “cleansed” as needed (John 13:10). When we live out New Testament “one-anothering,” we keep each other’s feet clean from the dirt picked up from walking in the world (John 13:14). Sharing life together in this manner is abiding in Christ— the work and joy of His Church (John 15:1—17, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:1-16).

HOWEVER...

If there are any in our fold who do not share our convictions about the importance of living as a church the way we are instructed by Christ through His Apostles, we have instruction regarding that as well. The issue isn't whether or not someone makes a mistake—that's inevitable for *all* of us. The issue is whether or not we are willing to react to our mistakes in a biblical manner. It is God's sincere hope that each of us will respond biblically whenever His Spirit identifies our mistakes—just between us and Him. If not, He leaves the responsibility of accountability with His church. God does want peace and harmony within the fold of His church, but on His terms. In all cases, His great hope and the hope of His church is that reconciliation will always take place.

Matthew

5:23-24

18:15-17

Luke

17:3-10

Romans

16:17-18

1 Corinthians

5:9-13

Galatians

6:1

2 Thessalonians

3:6, 14-15

Note the overwhelming disparity between the quantity of passages that call for patient brotherly love and the passages that call for accountable correction. It is reasonable to conclude that the latter should only be used as a last resort. Developing and nurturing strong relationships built on love, gentleness, patience and encouragement is the work God desires within His church. Apart from such relationships, spiritual correction has no foundation and will only breed resentment. That is why Jesus identified the “greatest commandments” for us (Matthew 22:34-40). This is the heart of His New Covenant with us (loving God with all we are, and loving our neighbor as ourselves)—the foundational truth of His Word on living the Christian life. This is the goal of all biblical church doctrine. Such a life of love will preclude the need for much of what is called “church discipline,” for love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8, James 5:20).

Apart from being the church in accordance with Christ’s instructions, “church” will never be more than another social organization for people to join, achieving only an occasional sense of relevance as it is tossed back and forth by the waves of cultural context in the ocean of history.

The “mission of the church” is to be the church, exactly the way Christ instructed us to be the church through His Apostles. When we go all in to living life in a community of faith this way, we are all happier, joy-filled, spiritually healthy people.

The end result? We achieve the purpose for which Christ built His church in the first place. When we relate to one another as God’s intends for His household, we display God’s truth, we develop genuine unity, we contribute to one another’s spiritual maturation, and thus reveal the manifold wisdom of God.