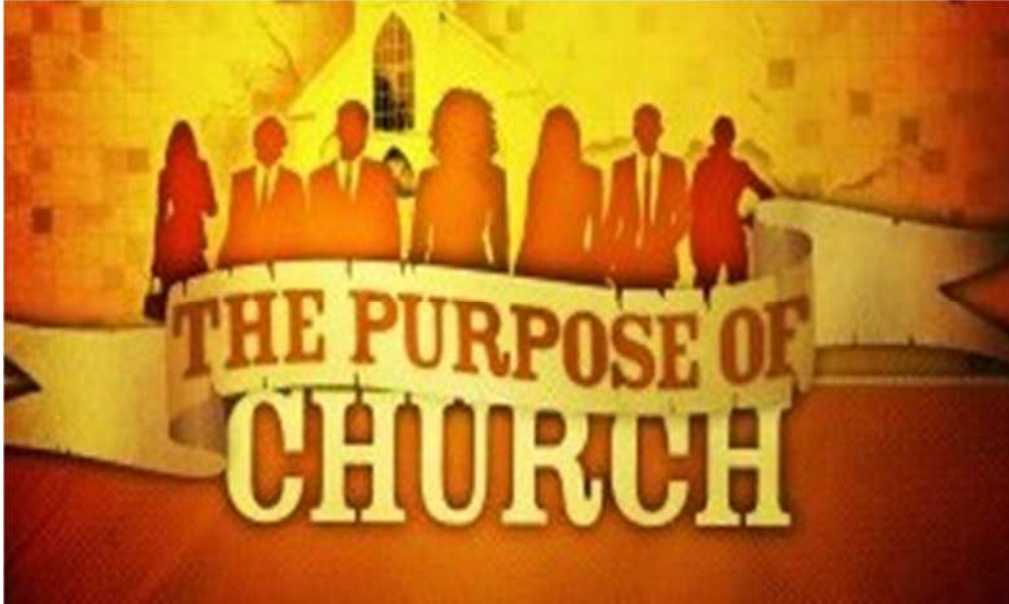


STEP BY STEP
Part Eight in a Series of Eight



8. Church Functions

**THE PURPOSE
OF THE CHURCH**

'caring for **PEOPLE** for **PEOPLE** matter to God' Romans 5:8

THE AIMS OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The in-thing for all sorts of organizations in recent years has been the development of what is called a 'mission statement'. This is true not just of religious organizations, which have always had a mission statement, but also of commercial organizations like banks and insurance companies, colleges and universities, indeed just about any kind of organization you care to mention.

WHY?

The simple answer is that leaders in all of these organizations have realised that much more can be accomplished if every part of the organization has a clear picture of the overall aims of the body.

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE? WHERE IS THE ORGANIZATION GOING? AND HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE?

It has become clear that if every person in the organization shares this same vision then all can work more cohesively, work more closely together to achieve their common aim.

No organization on earth could have more clearly defined aims than the church of our Redeemer. No organization could have more high or holy aims. No organization could have more praiseworthy, or notable aims than those of the church.

We want to pause at this time and examine the aims of the church as revealed in the New Testament.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH EXIST TO DO? WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION?

For some the church is a guard against loneliness and nothing more. Perhaps they are people who would see no one else from one week to the next if it were not for visiting the church. We are glad that such people can find some friendship but that is not what the church is about.

For others the church is a fashion parade. It is an opportunity to show off the new hat and coat. It is a time for noticing who is wearing the same old thing, and who is getting out their winter/spring wardrobe. Perhaps for some of the men it is a chance to see who is driving a new car, but that is not what the church is all about. For many the church is a social club with religious overtones.

There are luncheons and outings, even bingo. And the attendance at the bingo sessions work out at around double those at communion. Sadly, the church who sets itself down that road finds it very hard to compete with those who are truly in the field of entertainment. But entertainment is not really the field that the church is in, **this is not what the church is all about.**

WHAT IS WRONG?

What is wrong is that we have a **false view** of what the church is and what it is about.

THE LORD'S PLAN

WHY DID JESUS ESTABLISH THE CHURCH?

There was a popular theory at one time that it was the Lord's concept to establish a great kingdom here on earth, however everything went wrong when Jesus was arrested and then crucified. After this, the disciples came up with **plan B** which was to establish the church.

This will not hold water in the light of Scripture. It was always the **Lord's plan** to establish His church.

NOTE THE PROMISE OF JESUS

Matthew 16:18 'And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build **my church**, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.'

Ephesians 1:3-4 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.'

Ephesians 1:9+10 'He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.'

The church was ever in the eternal plan of God. It was always in God's plan and intention that the church should be established, it was chosen before the foundation of the world that this should be the means by which God might unite all in Him.

If all this be true, **what is the purpose of the church that God had in mind?**

HELPING THE HELPLESS

HELPING THE POOR

The whole thought of helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves is very much part of all that being a Christian is about. When Jesus taught the parable of the Good Samaritan the point was that the Samaritan acted as a good neighbour to the man who fell among thieves and that we are to go and do likewise. Please **Read Luke 10:25-37.**

Listen to the injunction of Paul in writing to the Galatians: **Galatians 6:9-10** 'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.'

The idea of doing good cannot be divorced from being a Christian.

Jesus speaks of this in **Matthew 25** and in most books of the New Testament there is some teaching on this.

Listen to the words of James the Lord's brother: **James 2:8** 'If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right.'

James 2:14-16 'What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?'

Certainly Christians cannot cancel world poverty by the amounts that we administer, but neither can we close our eyes to people in need who are around us. And just as it is something that the individual Christians were to bear in mind, then it became something that the church was to be concerned about as well.

There is an interesting passage in **Galatians 2**, when Paul who had been working as an apostle, in different areas from the other apostles. Paul comes to Jerusalem to meet with the other apostles. He compares notes with them to ensure that he is teaching the same things as they are. Please **Read Galatians 2:6-10.** Note what is said in the passage.

In New Testament times, collections were gathered by Paul from the various churches and taken to the elders in Jerusalem to distribute among the poor to help them during a time of famine. Please **Read Romans 15:25-27.**

Paul in another passage says: **Romans 12:13** 'Contribute to the needs of the saints, practise hospitality.'

By our banding together in the church, this opens the possibility of more work being done in this area. When a band of 100 Christians are together they have infinitely more capacity to help those who are in need than 100 individuals. The work of helping the needy may become more organized and hence more successful.

WORSHIPPING THE LORD

WORSHIPPING THE LORD

One of the primary functions of the church is certainly to worship the Lord. When we gather together as a body, invariably it is to offer worship to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we saw in an earlier lesson, Jesus spoke thus to the Samaritan woman: **John 4:23-24** 'But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'

God seeks to worship Him those who will worship in spirit and truth. It is God's will that His disciples and followers should meet together and worship Him. Indeed, we can go further and look at a direct commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ. During His temptation, the devil tempted Jesus to bow down and worship him. Jesus had his answer for Satan: Please **Read Luke 4:5-8**

Some might say that perhaps the Lord is quoting an Old Testament Scripture, which was for the Jews, but it would appear rather that He is stating a universal and eternal principle that man is to worship God.

The early church met together regularly to worship. In **Acts 2:42** it tells us that the early church was devoted to these meetings, during which worship was offered. Indeed, the writer to the Hebrews counsels them not to neglect their meeting together for worship. It was for their own encouragement. Please **Read Hebrews 10:24-25**.

The worship of God is central to the life of the church. God commands it and expects it from us. We need it for we were created as worshipful beings. The church exists to give glory to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 'So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.'

2 Corinthians 4:15 'so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.'

As the church grows in number then there are more and more people glorifying, worshipping God. Glory is given to God; glory is given to Christ in the church, which He purchased, with His own blood.

FEEDING THE BODY

EDIFYING THE BODY

Thirdly we notice, that there is another function of the church and that is to edify the body. The church is like a nursery for tender young plants. Little shoots of plants need to be cared for, nurtured, encouraged to grow. The church is a mutual help group. We are all in the business of helping one another to grow towards maturity. The word Edification is a key one in the New Testament.

When writing to the church in Corinth, a church that were in such a terrible state with many disruptions, and many divisions, Paul writes to them to try to sort out their difficulties. In the midst of doing that, I want us to note **1 Corinthians 14**. In the course of the 14th chapter the word 'edify' or its equivalent is used **9 times**.

I am speaking of equivalents such as, up building **v3**, Encouragement **v3**, Consolation **v3**, edifies **v4** twice, Edified **v5**, Benefit **v6**, Edified **v17**, Edification **v26**, indeed **v26** seems to be vital.

There is contained there a vital principle which is basic to all life in the church. '... **Let all things be done for edification.**' The main reason that God adds people to His church (**Acts 2:47**) is not because He needs us to be banded together in a church, but because He knows that we need it.

It is by this means that we are to receive enough edification to survive as a Christian. **Ephesians chapter 4** speaks of this in greatest detail. Please **Read Ephesians 4:11-16**. The purpose of the church is to up build itself in love. Thus a main purpose for the existence of the church is to be a means by which Christians find encouragement and hence are built up in their faith.

GOD'S PLAN A

Other Christians should be encouraging me and I should be encouraging them. This is the great victory of the church. It reminds us of the travesty if the church should become a place of discouragement. It is very easy to tear people down but the church exists to build up. It is easy to destroy faith, but the church exists to edify.

This is why it is important that Christians should be regular in their attendance. If not Christians shall miss out on our being built up spiritually. Christians who do miss out as usually made weaker as a result. We are there to help one another to heaven.

Galatians 6:2 'Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.'

EVANGELISING THE WORLD

Finally, we notice that the purpose of the church is to evangelise the world. The purpose of the church is to declare the gospel of Christ to a lost humanity. Originally the Lord selected just **12 men** who would be responsible for the spread of the Gospel to the whole world. Please **Read Matthew 28:18-20**.

The task was a mammoth one. It was enough to frighten anyone. Yet this was the challenge that Jesus gave to His disciples. Yet, **what was His Plan B?** There was none.

Jesus was depending on the disciples to perform a task that they would instruct and train the church to do. They were to go into all nations, making disciples of them, teaching them to observe all the commandments of the Lord.

Peter remarks that this is the purpose of existence of the church. Please **Read 1 Peter 2:9-10** and note his statement. Christians were called into the fellowship of the church that they might declare the goodness of God to us.

There are many passages, which indicate that it is the work of the church to declare the Gospel of Christ. Further in the same epistle, please **Read 1 Peter 3:15**. Yet this was not just the individual responsibility of individual Christians but was the corporate responsibility of the church.

We see this from the instructions of Paul to Timothy. Christians are given insight into what the policy of the church towards this was to be: Please **Read 2 Timothy 2:1-2**.

If the church is to grow, it will be because the members were involved in telling others the good things they have found by becoming a Christian. Churches that grow are churches where all the members are involved in telling. Please **Read Acts 8:1-4**, for an example. The Jerusalem church were scattered by persecution and as they went they told everyone they met about Jesus risen from the dead.

CAN WE REALLY APPLY SUCH THINGS TODAY?

It is because the church has not done so that we do not grow like the first century church did.

CONCLUSION

We see now before us the reason of the church. There are but four main functions of the church. We are members of this church and want to find ourselves to be involved in the work of the church. If that is to be so, it will obviously be in one or more of these areas.

EVALUATION SHEET

Please go ahead and fill in the evaluation sheet attached.

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: info@the-scriptures.co.uk

This study was written by © Alastair Ferrie

EVALUATION SHEET

Step by Step Lesson 8

(Please type or write your answers within the lines provided)

Name:

Home Address or Email address:

QUESTIONS:

(Please reply with your answers via e-mail or a separate sheet of paper.)

One of the things, which is most difficult in becoming a Christian at first, is to find your role, to find out in what areas you can truly serve the Lord and advance the cause of His church. One reason I wanted us to go through **this lesson** was to think about what realms you can serve the Lord if you become a Christian.

Where is your role?

In what areas can you serve?

Are there people you can invite to services?

Can you assist in children's classes?

Is there some service you can give to the community?

Is there some service you can perform which will assist worship?

Is there some way you can assist in evangelism?

Is there something I could do to help encourage my brothers and sisters?

That's us finished our study of the scriptures of these subjects I hope and pray that you have learned a lot about our God and what He expects from us. You will have already noticed that the '**churches of Christ**' try to live and worship God in the way God has asked of all Christians. We believe it's better to please Him than to please the world around us.

SENDING YOUR ANSWERS

Once we have received your evaluation sheet we will send you a certificate of completion.

Please return your completed evaluation sheet as an email attachment to info@the-scriptures.co.uk