

The New Testament Church
Part 7: The Purpose of the Church
 Colossians 1:13-23

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. In our previous lessons we've considered:
 - A. The importance of studying "the church" (Lesson #1).
 - B. A definition of "the church" (Lesson #2).
 - C. The universal church vs. the local church (Lesson #3)
 - D. Some portraits of "the church" (Lesson #4).
 - E. The establishment of "the church" (Lesson #5).
 - F. The foundation of "the church" (Lesson #6).
2. **2** In this, our seventh lesson in the series, we want to consider the purpose of "the church."
3. Amazingly, even in literature written by our own brethren, the purpose of "the church" is only rarely discussed, and even then it is a topic that receives only cursory coverage.
 - A. **3** In the broader scope of so-called "Christendom" the purpose of "the church" is undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood concepts in popular theology.
 - B. In fact, I would go so far as to say, that if you queried a thousand typical members of denominational churches you would get less than a handful that would even come close to knowing the purpose of "the church" as it is described in the New Testament.
 - C. Furthermore, I suspect that some who are members of the Lord's church would not be able to give a scriptural description of the purpose of "the church." Why?
 - (1) Because man has perverted "the church" to such a degree that what is passed off today as "the church" in most religious circles is not even a "forty second cousin" of the church we read about in the Bible.
 - (2) And, sadly, many "Christians" are such poor and/or lazy Bible students they are ignorant of what the Bible teaches about this critical concept.
 - (3) Further, what precious little many know about the purpose of "the church" is heavily influenced by denominational teaching or false concepts from liberal churches of Christ (**Jer. 5:31**: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so.").
4. In order to understand the purpose of "the church"; we need to understand, first of all, what we mean by purpose.
 - A. According to Dictionary.com purpose is "the reason for which something exists or is done, made, used, etc."
 - B. In other words:
 - (1) What is God seeking to accomplish in "the church"?
 - (2) Why did Jesus promise to build His church? Matt. 16:18 What did He die for? (**Acts 20:28**: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.")

5. If we can grasp a clear concept of the purpose of “the church” as set forth on the pages of the New Testament, we can eliminate the many errors which plague “the church” and are so rampant in today’s world, whether it be the denominational world or the Lord’s church itself.

II. DISCUSSION:

I. 4 A Mystery:

- A. God planned “the church” “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).
 B. However, over the centuries its coming and purposes remained a mystery:

Eph. 3:9: “...the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God...”

Eph. 3:3-5: “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:”

- (1) “mystery”: from Greek *musterion*; this doesn’t mean “the church” is some mysterious thing in the sense that it cannot be comprehended (e.g., Catholic philosophy); it simply means “the church” and its purpose was something “hidden,” unrevealed; God took His time in revealing, or uncovering, the nature and purpose of “the church.”
- (2) As we learned in previous lessons, “the church” is the *ekklesia*; the “called out” “body” of people.
- (a) Those who God “called...by...[the] gospel” (2 Thess. 2:14).
 (b) Those who God “called...out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).
 (c) Those Jesus “purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).
- (3) God, in His infinite wisdom, took centuries to reveal “the church” and its purpose.
- (a) “The church” is at the center of the scarlet thread of redemption that is the theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.
- (b) The first prophecy of it is in **Gen. 3:15**: “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”
- (c) “The church” is at the heart of the promises made to Abraham (**Gen. 12:2-3**: “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”).
- (d) But, for many good reasons, it took time for mankind to be ready for “the church” to be fully revealed (i.e., uncovered):
- Gal. 3:19:** “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made;”
- Gal 3:23:** “...before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”
- Gal. 4:4-5:** “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

- (4) God chose to reveal His church and its purpose in the first century A.D.

Eph. 3:1-7: “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,”

Eph. 3:8-11: “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,”

- (5) So now, “the church” and its purpose are manifest; it is no longer a secret, no longer a mystery.
- (6) That God has finally revealed the mystery of “the church” to us does not mean man is at liberty to take “the church” and mold it into something to achieve our own ends. God forbid!
- (a) We must look to the Scriptures and them alone for the divinely defined purpose of the church (1 Pet. 4:11).
- (b) Knowledge concerning God’s revealed purpose for “the church” is a crucial concept for us to grasp since it will determine our teaching, preaching, and behavior concerning “the church” (recall the Concepts chart).
- (c) Why does the denominational world get so many things wrong about “the church”? It is because they have the wrong concept concerning God’s purpose for “the church”!

2. 5 Purpose of the Church:

- A. Recall in Lesson #3 we made the distinction between “the church” in its universal sense versus its local sense.
- (1) The universal church exists regardless of time and geography and it includes all the faithful saints “in Christ” whether alive or dead (Matt. 16:18).
- (2) On the other hand, the local church is a specific group of Christians who are in the same geographical area and have purposed to band and assemble together as a body to fulfill specific goals and needs as specified by the NT; for example, the “church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2); or the Westside church of Christ that meets at 1301 N. Enterprise, Bloomington, IN.
- B. This being the case, when we talk about the purpose of “the church” we must be careful to draw the proper distinctions between the purpose of the universal church and the local church.
- (1) Universal Church:
- (a) It must also be kept in mind that any purpose or blessing which is “in Christ” is also in “the church” because “...He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Eph. 1:22-23)
- (i) To be “in Christ” is to be “in the church”; “All who are in Christ are identified as the church.” (Caldwell, p. 62)

- (ii) Christ and “the church” are inseparable, because “the church” is “His body” (Eph. 1:23); therefore, when we identify the purpose for being “in Christ” we’ve identified the purpose(s) of “the church.”

“God elected to save the body of faithful persons, the church, who are marked by the holiness and purity of Christ.

God chose Christ and God chose the church. The church is composed of individuals who come into Christ by responding to the conditions of the gospel and who remain devoted to him. God did not choose the individuals unconditionally apart from their own voluntary choice to live as a part of Christ’s body. God chose to save all in the class who truly comply with his will. He chose to save all who faithfully serve him in Christ.” (Caldwell, pp. 18-19)

(b) **6 Purposes:** the universal church:

- (i) Salvation: i.e., rescue, safety

2 Tim. 2:10: “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (Acts 2:38, 41, 47→2:21; 1 Thess. 5:9: we “obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”)

1 Pet. 2:10: “...called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; I O who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”)

- (ii) Reconciliation: “to remove all enmity and leave no impediment to unity and peace” (Vine).

Col. 1:21-22: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — “ (Eph. 2:16)

2 Cor. 5:19: “...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

Men are reconciled unto God if they are “in Christ,” in “His body,” “the church.”

- (iii) Redemption:

Eph. 1:7: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”

Col. 1:14: “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 20:28)

Rom. 3:24: “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”

1 Cor. 1:30: “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption”

Matt. 20:28: “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Redemption (Thayer): “a releasing effected by payment of a ransom” syn: deliverance, liberation

Men are liberated, redeemed from the bondage of sin only if they are “in Christ,” in “His body,” “the church.”

(iv) Spiritual Life:

Eph. 2:1, 5: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,” (v. 1); “made us alive together with Christ” (v. 5).

Rom. 6:3-4: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

(v) Sanctification: those “in Christ”; those who are members of “His body,” “the church” are often referred to as “saints”:

Eph. 1:1: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus”

Phil. 1:1: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi,”

In the book of Acts Luke speaks of “the church...at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1) and the “saints in Jerusalem” (Acts 9:13); synonyms if you will.

“saints” is from Greek *hagios*; Thayer: “set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his...”

BTW: This supports and confirms our earlier point that when speaking of “the church” we must realize we are always speaking of people. In this case, the purpose of the church is to set God’s people apart from the world (**1 Pet. 2:9:** “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”).

(vi) **7 Holiness**: “separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God, sacred.” (Vine)

Col. 1:21-22: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — “

Eph. 1:4: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should we be holy and without blame before Him in love” (v. 4)

(vii) Adoption:

Eph. 1:5-6: “having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself...to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved”

“God foreordained (i.e., predestined, cvt) that all those who voluntarily choose to walk by faith in Christ shall be added to his family by adoption. God willed in his love that those in Christ should be his sons with the full benefit of inheritance.” (Caldwell, p. 21)

“‘Adoption’ is placing a son (or a daughter) in a home as a natural child although in fact he is not his true descendant. It presupposes that the child is given full family membership including inheritance. Although otherwise he would not have been a member of the family, adoption affirms that the child has been given: (a) family relationship; (b) the rights and privileges of the family name; and (c) legal standing as a son.” (Caldwell, p. 21)

Note: In v. 5 our adoption is “according to the good pleasure of His will.”

“God intentionally purposed to adopt us as sons. He longingly desired to do so just as a man or woman might want more than anything else in the world to be able to adopt a child. God wants us!” (Caldwell, pp. 23-24)

Conclusion: One is in God’s family if he is “in Christ,” in “His body,” “the church.”

(viii) Inheritance:

Eph. 1:11: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance.”

Acts 26:18: “to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Rom. 8:17: “and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”

1 Pet. 1:4-5: “to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (Titus 3:7: this inheritance is “the hope of eternal life”).

(ix) Citizens of Heaven: we live in the world, but are not of the world, because:

Phil. 3:20: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”

Heb. 12:22-23: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven,”

Eph. 2:6-7: “and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Rev. 21:27: “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”

Conclusion: If you are not a member of “the church,” your name is not written in heaven; “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

(x) God’s wisdom and glory:

Eph. 3:10: “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,” (v. 10)

Eph. 3:21: “to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (v. 21)

(xi) All Spiritual Blessings: all “spiritual blessings” are in “the church”:

Eph. 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,”

(c) Much more could be said, but this must suffice for now due to the constraints of time.

(d) **8** One thing should be crystal clear: What is the common theme with all of these aspects concerning the purpose of the church”? They are spiritual, not physical (see Eph. 1:3).

(i) God did not design His church to solve all of the social, economic and political ailments of society!

- (ii) God did not design His church to serve all of the carnal (even legitimate) needs of man (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, companionship, social interaction, education, recreation, entertainment, politics, etc.).
- (iii) Denominationalism (including liberal churches of Christ!) has greatly perverted the nature and purpose of “the church” through the social gospel in an effort to create a utopia on earth.
- (iv) And, in the process today’s so-called “churches” are nothing more than a glorified country club, social service agency, or political action committee!
- (e) If we as men do anything to change, thwart, or diminish the God-given spiritual purposes of “the church” we are guilty of the most grievous sin one could possibly imagine!

****STOP**

(2) **9** Purpose of the Local Church:

“The local church is an independent functional entity. An ‘entity’ is a single person or thing, or a collected group of persons or things, considered as having distinctness in itself. ‘Functional’ suggests the capability of action, operations, or work. The church of Christ when viewed in the universal sense as comprising all saved persons is an entity but it is not a functional entity because the persons who compose it are not commissioned to come together to act or work collectively. It, therefore, has no capacity for collective action. **10** A church in a particular locality is both an ‘entity’ and ‘functional.’ Each local church has both the commission and capacity to function collectively. Each local church is ‘independent’ of all others; i.e., it is autonomous and thus not subject to any other for the authorization, support, oversight, or performance of its function(s).” (Caldwell, pp. 63-64)

11 “The Lord provided local churches for the purpose of accomplishing the collective activities of worship, teaching, edifying, and caring for one another. The *ekklesia* at Corinth gathered together to exercise discipline (1 Cor. 5:4-5), take the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:17-23), and edify one another in worship (1 Cor. 14:23-40). The *ekklesia* at Philippi “had fellowship” with Paul and ‘sent once and again’ to his need (Phil. 4:15-16). Other churches sent wages to Paul (2 Cor. 11:8). The Lord provided local churches for the purpose of bringing Christians together to be edified so that they can accomplish God’s work (Eph. 4:12).” (Caldwell, p. 64)

(a) **12** Evangelism: 1 Thess. 1:6-8

- (i) The biblical answer to the purpose of the church” in this regard, must necessarily begin by understanding man’s nature:
 - ☛ We are more than just a body of flesh (Jas. 2:26),
 - ☛ Our “*spirit*” is the aspect of our nature that makes us made in the “*image*” of God (Gen. 1:26),
 - ☛ Our “*spirit*” is eternal (Matt. 10:28),
 - ☛ Thus, man cannot “*live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matt. 4:4),
 - ☛ Furthermore, “*all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23),
 - ☛ The “*wages of sin is death*” (Rom. 6:23) “*in the lake of fire which burns with fire and brimstone*” (Rev. 21:8),
 - ☛ “*There is none righteous, no, not one*”; all of us are doomed to spiritual ruin! Rom. 3:10

- (ii) “In response to this spiritual problem the Lord was born and was named ‘Jesus’—‘for it is he that shall save his people from their sins’ (Matt. 1:21).” (Stauffer, p. 74)
Lk. 19:10: “For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”
I Tim. 1:15: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”
- (iii) Recall that to be “in Christ” is synonymous with being in “the church”; hence, “One would reasonably expect that the goal of the church is but an extension of the Lord’s own mission. And that is precisely what the Scripture teaches.” (Stauffer, p. 74)
- (iv) Jesus’ public ministry was preparatory for the issuance of the Great Commission; the Lord and Savior who “came to seek and save that which is lost” authorized His disciples to continue His great work:
Mk. 16:15-16: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”
Matt. 28:19-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you...”
- (v) Supporting this commission was the fact the Lord received “All authority...in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18); and promised the apostles “the Spirit of truth” (i.e., the Comforter, or Holy Spirit) who would “guide [them] into all truth” (Jn. 16:13).
- (vi) Paul defines the essence of the gospel in **I Cor. 15:1-4**
- ☛ The gospel declares the message of the Great Commission that Jesus “died for our sins” (v. 3).
 - ☛ Luke records Paul’s preaching of the gospel at Corinth: “...testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:5).
 - ☛ And when that message was received in a positive way “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).
- (vii) Very importantly note that in Paul’s preaching there is not even the slightest hint of anything having to do with social issues, political issues, economic issues, entertainment issues, recreational issues, etc.!
- ☛ “The intention of preaching was to cause all men, including principalities and powers in heavenly places, to see (perceive) that ‘through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known.’” (Chumbley, p. 57)
 - ☛ “Human happiness is not the object of the gospel; being right with God and others is the thrust of the ‘word of the message.’ Human welfare is a by-product of the teaching.” (Chumbley, p. 60)
- (viii) “The mission of each generation of disciples, according to the Lord’s order, is to teach them ‘to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you...even to the end of the world.’” (Matt. 28:20).” (Stauffer, p. 75)
- (ix) **13** The first century church as portrayed in the Book of Acts fully grasped this aspect of their mission and worked tirelessly to perform it.
- ☛ We see this in Acts 2 as the church has its “beginning” and the message of the Great Commission is preached for the first time: “Repent, and let every one of you be

baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38; cf. 2:21)

- ☛ Is it not significant, given the spiritual nature of the church’s mission, that the apostles did not “*leave the word of God and serve tables*” (Acts 6:2), but devoted themselves “*continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word*”? (Acts 6:4; this certainly is not descriptive of modern denominationalism and liberal churches of Christ!).
- ☛ Is it not significant that when a “*great persecution arose against the church...at Jerusalem*” and the disciples “*were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria*” that they “*went everywhere preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4)?
- ☛ Is it not significant that some of these preachers traveled as far north as Antioch of Syria (e.g., Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Silas; Acts 8; 11) “*preaching the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 11:20)?
- ☛ Is it not significant that the church in Antioch sent Paul, Barnabas, Silas and others into other parts of the world to preach the gospel? Acts 13
- ☛ Is it not significant that some of the churches Paul established helped support him as he preached the gospel in other places?

Church at Philippi: “*Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. I 6 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.*” (Phil. 4:15-16)

Other churches supported Paul: “*I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.*” (2 Cor. 11:8)

- (x) The first century church engaged itself in evangelism because it understood that “*the church*” is “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15) and they fulfilled that duty by upholding, supporting, and proclaiming the gospel in their home towns and as far and as wide as their means and circumstances would allow. (barber and “youth group” activities)
- (b) **14 Edification:**
- (i) “Support of the truth also demanded that the church edify or build up its own members in the faith. Baptized believers were taught the need to maintain faithfulness unto Christ as Lord.” (Stauffer, p. 75)
- Acts 2:42:** “*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*”
- 1 Cor. 15:58:** “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*”
- 2 Pet. 3:17-18:** “*You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; I 8 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:5-11)
- (ii) The idea of “*edify*” comes from a Greek word originally used to describe the act of building a structure.

- ☛ Through inspiration Paul tells us it is the responsibility of “the church” to edify, or build up, itself:

Eph. 4:15-16: *“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

 - ☛ Paul further tells us Jesus gave various gifts to men to achieve this purpose: *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,”* (Eph. 4:11)
 - ☛ “These gifts were designed ‘for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ’ (Eph. 4:12).” (Stauffer, p. 75)
- (iii) Apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church by the divine revelation given them by Christ through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13; Eph. 2:20-22; 3:1-5).
 - ☛ Evangelists, pastors and teachers use this revealed truth “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph. 4:16)
 - ☛ “‘Perfect’ means to ‘equip,’ as in fishermen ‘mending their nets’ (Matt. 4:21).” (Stauffer, p. 76)
 - ☛ It means mending, equipping, or preparing the nets to do their intended job; in like manner “the church,” through teaching, prepares saints to do what the Lord expects of them.
- (iv) “Saints are designed to do “the work of ministry”—the work of service in the kingdom.” (Stauffer, p. 76)
 - ☛ Greatness in God’s kingdom is determined by this work and not on positions of authority (**Matt. 20:26-28:** *“...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*).
 - ☛ “Ministry includes preaching the gospel, teaching the brethren, restoring the erring, bearing the burdens for the distressed, helping the needy, cheering the fainthearted, admonishing the disorderly, comforting the brokenhearted (see Acts 8:1-3; 2 Tim. 2:2; Gal. 6:1,2; Acts 4:32-35; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:15; 1 Thess. 4:17).” (Stauffer, p. 76)
- (v) Paul also said “the church” works to the “building up of the body of Christ” or “building up itself in love” (Eph. 4:12, 16).
 - ☛ In other words, “It strengthens itself so that all members might arrive at a oneness of the faith, attain unto the knowledge of Christ, and measure up to the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Stauffer, p. 76)
 - ☛ The church must devote great effort to developing spiritual maturity in its members so that “we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” (Eph. 4:14).

(vi) ** Each local church must have a teaching program that is: **1**) devoted entirely to the Scriptures (1 Pet. 4:11; Jn. 6:68; 12:48), **2**) teaches “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), **3**) that jealously guards its members from false teachers and false teaching (1 Jn. 4:1), **4**) that equips them to battle Satan (1 Pet. 5:8), and, **5**) that helps us become “a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Gal. 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

2 Cor. 10:5: “bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,” **

(vii) “Edification is the reason brethren assemble. They ‘consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling together as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another’ (Heb. 10:24,25).” (Stauffer, p. 76)

- ☛ Sadly some brethren ignore this important mission of the church and are neglectful in their attendance.
- ☛ They not only frustrate their own spiritual growth, but they are a detriment to their families and to “the church” “which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

(viii) The very same gospel that draws men to Christ for salvation also builds up our faith, increases our love toward God and man, and strengthens our hope! “This work is an extension of the church’s responsibility as the ‘pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15).” (Stauffer, p. 76)

(ix) There are other things that fall under the purview of *edification* (e.g., worship and church discipline) that we will consider as separate topics.

(c) **15 Benevolence:**

(i) From the very beginning of “the church”; brethren took care of the *physical* needs of fellow saints who were in need because of adverse circumstances.

- ☛ At the beginning of “the church” (e.g., Acts 4) we are not exactly sure what caused the physical needs to arise; most likely it was due to the fact that many in “the church” had been away from their homes for quite some time as they observed the Passover and Pentecost (months) in Jerusalem.
- ☛ They ended up staying much longer than they originally planned and probably used up all of their travel resources.
- ☛ But, one thing is sure; they willingly took care of one another’s physical needs!

Acts 4:34-35: “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

(ii) “‘Benevolence’ meant originally ‘to wish well’ and now describes in English—acts of kindness, charitableness, doing good for needy ones.” (Stauffer, p. 77)

- ☛ Even though the NT does not use the exact word “benevolence” it nonetheless accurately describes what the early church practiced towards its members who had physical needs.
 - ☛ For example, the apostles implemented a “benevolence” program in Acts 6 to insure that the needs of the Grecian widows were met.
- (iii) We also read of other times in the Book of Acts when brethren fell upon hard times.
- ☛ About a decade after Pentecost a great famine inflicted Judea:

Acts 11:27-20: *“And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”*
 - ☛ Even later there were “poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem”:

1 Cor. 16:1-2: *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”* (cf. 2 Cor. 8 & 9)

Rom. 15:25-26: *“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.”*
- (iv) It is essential for us to note that in every case in the NT “*the church*” was not involved in “general” benevolence to just anyone.
- ☛ We as individual Christians have a responsibility in that regard (Jas. 1:27; Matt. 25:31-46).
 - ☛ “*The church*” is not in business to alleviate world poverty, in fact such is impossible! Mk. 14:7
 - ☛ In every case in the NT where “*the church*” aided those in need it was limited to “needy saints.”
 - ☛ The Lord in His wisdom spared “*the church*” from an impossible task that would distract it from its more important spiritual goals of evangelism and edification.
- (v) Very importantly, “The Bible sharply distinguishes between what individual Christians may do and what the church may do.” (Stauffer, p. 77)
- ☛ Saints are to provide for their own relatives (**1 Tim. 5:8:** *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”*).
 - ☛ The distinction between our individual responsibility and that of “*the church*” is very clear (**1 Tim. 5:16:** *“If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”*).
 - ☛ “Many distortions of the church’s mission manifest themselves when a distinction is not maintained between the ‘church’ and the ‘individual.’” (Stauffer, p. 77)

- ☛ I would quickly add, that when we shift our individual responsibilities, insofar as benevolence is concerned, to “the church” we also endanger our souls by fooling ourselves into believing we’ve fully discharged our individual benevolent responsibilities!

III. CONCLUSION: 16

1. The NT is the only source where we can learn of the purpose and mission of “the church” (**Col. 3:17**: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”; 1 Pet. 4:11). To look elsewhere will only produce the divisions and factions of denominationalism and frustrate the cause of Christ.
2. By opening the pages of the NT we can see faithful brethren, under the direction of the inspired apostles and prophets, conducting themselves as God intended (guidebook, handbook).
3. They did not sponsor social events and banquets, supply entertainment and recreation, provide secular education, attempt to alleviate world poverty, advocate political candidates and causes or operate a business.
4. They gave themselves fully and completely to spreading the gospel message, spiritually edifying the saints and providing aid to “saints” when those needs arose.
5. By this single-minded devotion, the early church was able to preach the gospel “in all the world” (Col. 1:6) in just 30 years; forever influencing the world for good.
6. “Their zeal and dedication are to this day admired and praised by all who read the stirring story of their success. May the church today first give themselves to the Lord and seek to recapture that commitment and enthusiasm without modifying the goals the Lord set before it (see 2 Cor. 8:5).” (Stauffer, p. 78)

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The Purpose of the Church, Harry Pickup, Jr.

“Change is a characteristic of our culture; sacredness and immutability are not. Changing God’s original purpose of His church is consistent with our culture. Man’s good intentions are often substituted for God’s purpose.” (Chumbley, p. 60)