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God's Purpose for the Church

By Harold Turner

If a person was to view the church today from an outsider's point of view, he might conclude that God actually had very little to do with the institution and organization of the church. This might even be true with many members of today's churches. This is true because if one studies the various characteristics of the modern religious institutions, he finds very little similarity with the church described in the Bible.

It seems that the majority of people minimize both the value and importance of the church. With many the church is only a substitute for God's original plan for the kingdom. It is said that Jesus came to set up the kingdom of God, but being rejected by his own people, he substituted the church for the kingdom, intending at some later time to establish the kingdom. This false teaching has minimized the value of the church.

The absurd idea that God could not cause his plan to be carried out in every detail is a derogatory reflection upon the wisdom and foreknowledge of God. This idea is necessary, however, to both dispose of the present existence of the kingdom, and to minimize the value of the church.

Ephesians 3:1-11 shows that the church was according to the eternal purpose of God, and that the purpose for the church was in the mind of God from the beginning of the world. The Bible makes no distinction between the church and the kingdom, this distinction exists only in the minds of men. A study of the distinct characteristics of both the church and kingdom will show clearly that these two expressions are used to define the same organization.

For the church to have been in the mind of God from the beginning of the world would suggest that his purpose for the church was highly important. It would be completely impossible for us to properly evaluate the church apart from understanding God's purpose for it. In the remainder of this article, let's look at three distinct purposes for the church, which should help us to appraise it with great importance.

GOD'S PLAN FOR UNITING ALL MEN IN ONE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY:

The design of the church is to include every race and class of believers in one religious body. In Gal. 3:28, Paul shows that God's purpose was to unite all in one

body; "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the early years of the church these barriers were difficult problems to overcome. For over 1500 years a wall of hatred existed between the Jew and Gentile nations. In the Great Commission, Jesus had instructed, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is estimated to be some 8 to 10 years before the gospel was ever preached to the Gentiles, and then it took a miracle to convince the apostle Peter to do this. In Acts 10:28 he shows that the Great Commission had not been understood to be for, or to include the Gentiles. Peter said, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." When he returned to Jerusalem, other Jews contended with him, saying, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." This was only the beginning of this racial problem, which, as the gospel began to be taken more fully to the Gentiles, became more violent. The Jews persecuted those who preached Christ to the Gentiles, and did everything they could to put a stop to this preaching.

If there ever was a time when men needed two churches it would have been in the first century. But, God planned that all races and classes be united into one religious body. In Acts 15:9 the apostles declared that God "put no difference between them and us." In Eph. 3:6, Paul wrote, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." And in Eph. 2:16 he said, "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

The mass of religious institutions today are a disgrace to the plan of God to bring together in one all believers in Christ. In John 17:21, Jesus prayed for all who would believe on him through the word of his apostles, saying, "That they all may be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The apostles

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ELDERS ARE EXAMPLES TO THE CHURCH

By Glynn V. Purdy

It is God's will that each congregation of His church have elders, or bishops, or "overseers" (Acts 20:28). There are qualifications for elders as there are qualifications for Christians. Many people think that they are Christians, others consider them as Christians, and yet if they have NOT done what God commands them to do to become Christians, then the truth is they are NOT Christians. The same is true of elders. Many people may think they are elders, and the congregation may call them elders, and obey them as elders, and in every way consider them elders, and yet if they do not meet the qualifications of elders, then God does NOT consider them as elders, or the truth is they are not elders. God tells us how to become a Christian, and God tells us how to become elders. When we comply with God's will we can become Christians, and when we comply with God's will we can become elders. If to fail in one point will not permit us to be Christians, then why not the same in regard to elders? God's law MUST be obeyed in ALL things.

From 1 Tim. 3:2-7 we read: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity: (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest he being lifted up with pride he fall into condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

In short, an elder must be a Christian and be able to perform any service in the church which is needed. He must be a man of great faith and vision, for he is the "Stewart" of God (Titus 1:7), and to Him he must give account of how he serves. He must have wisdom and knowledge to plan the Lord's work, that the church is "fed" and "led". He is NEVER a follower, but must always be a

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Forgiveness

Forgiveness is most important. The willingness to forgive is essential to the welfare of society as well as the individual. It benefits the person forgiving and the person being forgiven. Unless we are able to forgive we will suffer, and we will cause others to suffer. Forgiveness, next to love is perhaps the most essential ingredient of the Christian life, and love is not real unless it prompts one to forgive.

Forgiveness carries with it the idea of a complete release. Thayer defines the word from the Greek to mean: "To release as from bondage or imprisonment, forgiveness or pardon from sins." This word is related to another word which means: bond, or connection. If we combine these principles, we have this thought; "I will forgive what you have done and love you as though you had never done it." Until we come to this place in our Christian development, we have not truly begun to live the Christian life.

Jesus said, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." (Mark 11:25). It is not that God is not big enough or that he is not capable of forgiving us without our forgiving others, but if God forgave us without our forgiving others we would fall far below that high standard by which our lives are to be fashioned.

Some will say; "I'd forgive him if he would ask me." Others will say; "He won't forgive anybody — why should I forgive him?" This kind of thinking is sinful. God always forgives in a merciful way. If God only forgave us as we deserved to be forgiven we would all die and be lost eternally.

Jesus said, "As ye would that men do to you, do ye even so to them." When we reach this state of Christian development we will begin to enjoy life — not before.

Would Jesus Be Received Today?

By David Crawford

In John 1:11, the Bible states, concerning Jesus, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Do you believe that Jesus would be received today if he came to earth as he did over nineteen hundred years ago? Or would these words from the gospel according to John describe the attitude of modern man toward him? Of course, when Jesus comes again it will be to judge the world (Matt. 25:31-46), and not to minister in the manner that he did during his first advent. But if he were to come today, would he be received? I believe that generally speaking Jesus would be rejected again.

If Jesus reappeared people would be astonished at his doctrine just as they were when he delivered the sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:28). In this sermon several distinct points were made by the savior which the world has generally refused to accept.

Jesus taught that divorce and remarriage is allowable only in cases where adultery takes place (Matt. 5:31-32). The world does not now believe this is a necessary rule of life. It would not receive Jesus for insisting on this if he were to reappear.

Jesus clearly demands first place for his kingdom (Matt. 6:33). Men feel that many reasons justify allowing the kingdom to be set aside.

Our Lord revealed that relatively few will be saved (Matt. 7:13-14). And who believes that? "Anything goes in religion if undergirded by sincerity; we are all headed for the same place." Is Jesus narrow and bigoted for insisting that the "few" will find the way leading to life? Would he be received for so teaching if he reappeared?

If Jesus reappeared people would not accept his promise to build one church. That is precisely what he did promise to do (Matt. 16:18). Plagued with denominations of human origin it is difficult for men to accept the fact that Jesus promised and built one non-denominational church. This view is too restricted for many people.

If Jesus reappeared men would not receive his insistence on baptism. Yet, he made it a condition of pardon from sin (Mark 16:16). How tragic that men give less importance to this act than did Jesus, God's Son.

Would you receive Jesus if he suddenly reappeared? You don't need to be literally faced by Jesus to know the answer to this question. When Jesus sent the twelve apostles out on the limited commission to the lost sheep of the house

ELDERS ARE EXAMPLES (Cont.)

leader. He must show faith or else the congregation will not manifest faith. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly: not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Yes, the elders are "overseers" but not "lords". They are "shepherds" to "lead" but never to "drive". They are "ensamples" (examples) to the whole world. An elder who asks others to teach, should also teach. An elder who asks others to attend all the services of the church, should first attend all the services himself. When he asks the congregation to support the work with their money, he must give scripturally, and will if he is an elder according to the Bible. When an elder asks the congregation to be friendly to one another and others, then he will "show himself friendly" as well as his family. Yes, the elder MUST control his family, or else he cannot oversee the church. There is no exception. When an elder asks the congregation to manifest faith, he too must show faith, as an example, to encourage others. God's people have never in any age, nor will they ever rise above their leaders, for it is almost impossible as the leaders must adopt the programs and "set the pace" for the others to follow.

God's elders will NEVER demand, but will lead, guide and encourage the congregation so that they are inspired, by example and DESIRE to follow leaders with faith, courage and determination. When the elders manifest faith it is an inspiration to the "flock", but when the elders lack faith and leadership the "flock" will not be "fed" and the world will not be taught as God commands. Yes, God can command and demand, but elders are "shepherds" and always lead the "flock" where they can work and "feed" on God's word and enjoy His blessings.

of Israel, he declared, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." The principle is applicable to our day. To receive the apostles then would have been to receive the words given to them by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 10:19-20). This would have been to receive Jesus himself and also the Father. Likewise to receive Christ and the Father today, one must receive the words of his ambassadors, the twelve apostles, as found in the New Testament. Have you received their commands: Faith in Christ, repentance, confession of the name of Jesus, baptism for the remission of sins, and to live a godly life? Would you receive Jesus today if he reappeared? To answer one of these questions is to answer both.

Marital Unfaithfulness

Why So Much Of It?

by James Knight

Marriage was instituted by God for the happiness of man and woman. God intended that those who enter into the marriage relationship be faithful to each other and to Him. However, there are far too many who are unfaithful to their marriage vows as they relate to the sexual aspect of life. I am convinced that unfaithfulness, or the committing of fornication, is the prime reason for divorce at this present time. A question is in order at this point. Why are so many husbands and wives being unfaithful to their partners?

In order to answer this question I want us to observe what the Bible teaches about sex in marriage. God knew that the sexual desire in man is very strong, and therefore, provided marriage as a means of fulfilling these desires.

In 1 Cor. 7:1-5, Paul said, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife her due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

There are several things that I would like for us to note from the foregoing Scripture. (1) Marriage is designed to prevent fornication. (2) Sexual relations are proper only between husbands and wives. (3) The husband and wife are to render unto each other their due with regard to sex. (4) In marriage we no longer have complete control over our own body, it belongs to our husband or wife. (5) To defraud our companion of sexual fulfillment leaves them open to temptation by the Devil to commit sexual sins.

With these thoughts in mind, I want to make a statement that many may not like, but I ask that you consider carefully what is said. I am convinced that the reason that many husbands and wives are unfaithful is because one or both have failed to fulfill their obligation in a sexual way: Yes, I am sure that there are times when it is proper for the wife to abstain from sexual relations with her husband. I am also sure that there will be times when the husband will not be able to respond

CONFESSION OF JESUS AS THE CHRIST

By Ordell Heavin

Two verses of Scripture will serve to introduce this lesson, Matt. 10:32-33, and Romans 10:9-10. In Matthew, Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." In Romans Paul said, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

The promise of the Messiah (Christ) was first given when God appeared to Abraham in Ur of Chaldees, some 2,000 years before Jesus was born. Jesus of Nazareth was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. He was first confessed as the Son of God, by God himself (Matt. 3:16-17). Later on the Mount of Transfiguration, God again acknowledged Jesus as His Son, and therefore, the Messiah. This time God added these words, "Hear ye Him." (Matt. 17:5). Simon Peter was the first man to confess that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God (Matt. 16:13-18). Jesus had inquired as to what the people were saying concerning Him. There was a variety of opinions. When Jesus asked the apostles for their belief, Peter stated, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the

to his wife, but these should be kept to a minimum.

If husbands and wives are going to be happy and fulfill their God given responsibility in this aspect of marriage, there must be a great deal of understanding on the part of each. We must realize the differences in the desires of the male and female, and learn to cope with these in marriage. We will also have to lay aside our feelings at times to help our mate remain faithful to us and to God.

A careful study of the Scriptures will be most helpful to husbands and wives in knowing how to conduct themselves in marriage, and when husbands and wives conduct themselves properly there will be much less marital unfaithfulness.

"Fools make a mock at sin." Prov. 14:9.

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Prov. 15:3.

living God." There are two aspects of Peter's confession that indicates Jesus' relationship to God and to man. "Thou art the Christ" indicates that Jesus is the Savior and Redeemer of the human family. "The Son of the living God" indicates that he is divine. As the Son of Mary, and the Son of God, He stands as the only Redeemer who ever, and will ever live. Acts 4:12 states, "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved." These facts form the foundation on which our salvation rests. The meaning of this confession is the corner stone of the Christian faith. Modernists who deny the divinity of Jesus, deny in reality the entire word.

Those who hope to obtain salvation, must with their lips confess Christ (Matt. 10:32-33). Romans 10:9-10 shows this confession as a condition to our salvation. John says, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." (1 John 4:15). There are two means by which we can confess our faith in Christ (1) with our mouth, as stated in Romans 10:10, and (2) by walking in the light, as He is in the light, becoming the "Light of the world." Almost anyone you meet on the street will say he believes in Jesus, but few are willing to make their lives a living confession to this effect.

Any time we become a part of wrong doing, we deny Christ in our life, and we are, as Hebrews 6:6 states, "Crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." We may deny Christ today, but someday the Bible declares, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess to God." (Phil. 2:9-11). We will confess Christ, but God has granted us the privilege as to when we choose to confess Him. We can confess His name at our own free will and live this confession in our lives by obeying all that He has given us to do, or we can wait until the day of judgment, and make this confession, but then it will be too late.

Have you confessed with your mouth the name of Jesus as the Lord and Christ? Are you confessing by the manner of the life you live that he is truly your Lord and Master? With the mouth we make this confession UNTO salvation. This indicates that we do believe with all our heart that Jesus is the Christ, that we have turned our allegiance, by repentance, from serving sin with the determination to serve Jesus as Lord. At this point one is ready to be "Baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3) where he can live and serve the Lord faithfully as a living confession of his faith

WHY I ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY

Members of the church will often ask, "Is it necessary for me to attend church services?" No intelligent person would ask, "Must I eat every time I am hungry?" There are obvious reasons for attending services faithfully. Regularity and spirituality are closely related. The soul as well as the body must be fed at regular intervals. The Christian who sings, "When the roll is called up yonder I'll be there," and is then absent from the services half the time needs to harmonize his practice with his singing. It is doubtful if one can be present there when one is consistently absent here.

I attend the church services regularly because Christ expects me to do so (Matthew 18:20). When I am absent, I am deprived of the blessing his presence imparts to me. If the apostles and the early Christians were living today, they would attend the services faithfully. Therefore, I am unable to condone in my life a practice which would have been unacceptable to them. (Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2)

I should not let the church down, because it is the church that holds me up. It is the church that rejoices when I rejoice and that weeps when I weep. It is the church that will pray for me when I am sick, comfort my loved ones when I am gone, and provide me with a decent Christian burial.

I support the services of the church because it is a ~~son~~ not to do so (Hebrews 10:25.) My presence strengthens and encourages others (Hebrews 10:24). The services of the church keep me holy in heart, humble in life and grateful in spirit. My presence shows that I love the Lord (John 14:15).

Attending the services of the church makes me a better person, because at such services I associate with good people. Good people can always be found in God's house, and they are there because they are trying to become better. They realize they are not perfect.

My presence at the appointed times indicates my faithfulness to the Lord (Revelation 2:10). Someday I hope to hear him say, "Well done." He cannot say, "Well done" if I have not done well.

-Adair P. Chapman

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Prov. 14:12.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Prov. 14:34.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." Prov. 15:1.

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH (Cont.)

supported this petition of Jesus, as seen in 1 Cor. 1:10, where Paul pleads, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." The church is the only hope for the unity of all believers in one religious society.

GOD'S PLAN FOR BLESSING HIS PEOPLE SPIRITUALLY

God had promised Abraham that in his seed all families of the earth would be blessed. In Gal. 3:16, Paul said, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ." In verse 29 Paul continued, saying, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." These Scriptures show that God had in mind to bless the spiritual seed of Abraham in a special way, and that those in Christ are the subjects of this promise.

In Eph. 1:3 Paul said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." He then continued to list a number of these spiritual blessings: Adoption into God's family, acceptance with God, redemption and forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace, wisdom and prudence, and heirs of the eternal inheritance in glory. These along with all other spiritual blessings are enjoyed only by those in Christ.

Now, to understand the relationship of these blessings to the church, we must understand that to be in Christ is to be in the church, which is his body (Eph. 1:22-23, Col. 1:18, 24.) In Rom. 12:5, Paul said, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ..." In Gal. 1:22 he speaks of "The churches of Judea which were in Christ." Being in the church, then, is to be in Christ; for the church is in Christ. In 1 Cor. 6:15, Paul said, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" Too, in Acts 4:12 we are told that there is no salvation outside Christ, and in Acts 2:47 that the Lord adds to the church such as should be saved. Salvation is in Christ, and salvation is in the church; for being in the church is to be in Christ. So the church is the place where God bestows all spiritual blessings.

GOD'S PLAN FOR RECONCILING ALL MEN UNTO HIMSELF

Because of his sin, man became an enemy to God, and he continues in this separated state until he can be reconciled with God. Before one can be reconciled unto God, he must be in God's designated place, which is within the church. Paul

shows this in Eph. 2:16, "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross..." Reconciliation is made possible by the cross, but it is in the church that we are reconciled unto God. In Col. 1:21-22 Paul shows that outside the church we are enemies to God.

CONCLUSION:

The church is of divine origin. It was planned by God long before it was established. God's plan for the church is to unite all in one fellowship spiritually, to bring all into a state where they can enjoy all spiritual blessings, and the place where lost man can become reconciled unto God. The church is the most important institution on the face of this earth; for only through the church can we become heirs to the eternal inheritance in glory. The Bible states that "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it..." And that he purchased it with his own blood (Acts 20:28). May we ever honor and praise God for this glorious institution - the church.

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