

July 17, 2016

- Ephesians 4:1-12 - The Purpose of the Church

Introduction:

In 1734, a handful of preachers began to preach in the churches and in the streets and in the fields. So many people came to Christ that this era came to be known as “The Great Awakening.” Tens of thousands dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ. The great awakening saw the likes of Edwards, Finney, Whitfield, and Westley. Benjamin Franklin wrote, “It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent, it seemed as if the entire world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.” --- Why am I telling you all this?

America is in trouble. As a people we have forgotten God. We remember how Israel denied the Lord, they defied the law, and they defiled the land. So, God had to judge them. The parallel with America is obvious and alarming. No nation has ever had a Christian beginning like the USA. We have been blessed by God, but we have defiled our land. We are a broken nation full of broken people who have broken God's laws and broken God's heart. Like ancient Israel, we are suffering the consequences of our national wickedness and removing ourselves from the protective canopy of God. Like ancient Israelites they feared the giants that existed in the promise land even as God instructed His people to possess the land but they would not.

---Numbers 13

Ladies and gentlemen may I suggest to you this morning what America needs to survive is a next generation of Christians that will face the giants. We will need Christian men and women who are not afraid of the cultural giants that impede this nation. I am talking about the giants of complacency, political correctness, indifference; immorality, homosexuality, greed, lust, narcissism and materialism just to name a few. We will need a next generation that will stand up for Jesus Christ and not be afraid of the worldly giants. We will need a next generation of men and women who believe as David did in the power of God and the righteousness of God. **What shall we then say to these things? If God [be] for us, who [can be] against us? Romans 8:31**

The remedy we need does not come from Washington. Washington does not have the answers to the problems we face. World-political bodies, such as the United Nations do not have the answers to the problems we face. Popular political pontiffs do not have the answers to the problems we face. God has afforded us a solution...the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus speaking to Peter in Matthew 16:18 said, **upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

The church must intercede for America unlike any other period in our history. The consequences of failing to intercede are unthinkable. We are in a spiritual warfare and we need a spiritual answer. **(For the weapons of our warfare [are] not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) II Corinthians 10:4**

I. The Problem

1. We need a next generation of Christians that will understand the purpose of the church of Jesus Christ upon this earth. We will need Christian men and women who are not afraid to walk the Christian walk and who will not forsake the church. Hebrews 10:25 says, "**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The Hope for America and the Nations lies within the Church. II Chron. 7:14 –

2. Wade Clark a sociologist at the University of Santa Barbara did an exhaustive study of religion among baby boomers, people born between 1946 and 1964. He called his book A Generation of Seekers and he found that this generation considers itself the most spiritual generation in recent history. But he's quick to point out that spiritual is not the same as church going, because 80% of the baby boomers he surveyed said that it was their conviction that a person could be a devout Christian without any involvement in a local church. You hear this over and over these days, I read my Bible and I pray so what I miss church." The majority of professing Christians in our communities today fit into that category. We need a next generation of "on fire" Christians for Jesus Christ! We have a detached generation.

3. Now let's move to the millennials because the trend of absentee Christians is most noticeable among millennials and congregations have been struggling to put them back in the pews. Many millennials those born between 1981 and 2000 will never, ever convert, no matter what the church does. They are simply not interested in church, organized religion or religion in general, and no number of projectors, hip, youthful pastors, or Twitter hashtags are going to change that. This is a statement from a millennial activist in Chicago; I quote.

"Millennials are not interested in a celestial Jesus with a permanent smile and open arms, unconcerned with the goings-on of planet Earth. We've heard about that Jesus our entire lives, and we're not buying it. What I and people my age are looking for is a church that preaches not just inspirational love, but that prophetic fire that makes Jesus so appealing. A church that stressed this aspect of the faith would be dangerous, to be sure. But the inconvenient truth is that if you really want millennials back in the pews, you've got to light the church on fire." Isn't that exactly what Jesus told us to do?

Barna research shows that Millennials—are hyperaware and deeply suspicious of the intersection of church and consumer culture. Three in ten Millennials say church is not at all important while an additional four in ten feel ambivalent, saying church is either somewhat important or somewhat not important? Only 8% say they don't attend because church is "out of date," undercutting the notion that all churches need to do for Millennials is to make worship "cooler."

"The church seems too much like an exclusive club" is an accurate description (44%). Taken together, a significant number of young adults perceive a lack of relational generosity within the U.S. Christian community. Perhaps more concerning are the two-thirds of Millennials who

believe that American churchgoers are a lot or somewhat hypocritical (66%). To a generation that prides itself on the ability to smell a fake at ten paces, hypocrisy is a worrisome indictment. They don't see the churches on fire impacting the community or the world.

4. Today we will begin a series of messages on the "Nature of the Church". We will look into the purpose of the church as defined by the scriptures and the designer Himself "Jesus Christ". We must come to understand the church is the light and salt of this world. Folks look at our world! Jesus Himself was the one who ordained and commissioned the church. The church was empowered by the Holy Spirit just as Jesus promise in John 14: 16, 17 and Acts 1:8. The lives of the disciples were completely transformed on the day of Pentecost. The Church exploded as we read in Acts 2:**41** **Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls.**

II The Purpose define: Matt. 28:19-20

1. Why does the church exist? What is it ultimate purpose? Jesus Christ, before ascending to the Father, spoke directly to these questions. One day on a mountain in Galilee He spoke in clear and simple language in (Matt. 28:19-20). "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Stating it still more simple the disciples of Christ heard Jesus say that day, "Go everywhere and win men to Christ [that is, make Christians], and then baptize them and teach them. What are we teaching them today?

2. The Book of Acts demonstrates this beyond doubt... Luke's document is a precise record of the disciples' activities and accomplishments as they seriously and systematically carried out Jesus Christ's marching orders. People who became followers of Christ were immediately identified as "disciples." They were not called Christians until the church was founded in Antioch (Acts 11:26). They cared for one another and assisted the assembly.

The church therefore exists to carry out two foundational functions—evangelism (to make disciples) and edification (to teach them). By these two functions we can define the purpose of the church is to produce mature believers in Jesus Christ engaging them in local gathered community. So what is the local gathered community?

3. Look at **Revelation 1:11**. This is the local body of believers (Christians) in Jesus Christ. It is vitally important to come together to fulfill its purpose. It is designed to have leaders and teachers. It's amazing what some believe the purpose of the church really is. Because people are not interested in the Word the church puts on an entertainment spectacular. Such events take place like this every week across America. It is like we exist to entertain not interact.

Illustration:

The Rev. James Cooper, rector of the celebrated Episcopal sanctuary at Broadway and Wall St., greeted worshipers one Sunday in some highly unorthodox vestments -- a checker red-and-white clown suit, red fright wig, rubber nose and large floppy shoes. Then, in what was

almost surely the most unusual church service most parishioners ever experienced, he presided at a "Clown Eucharist" that included circus music during the opening procession, a mimed sermon, jugglers and outlandishly dressed ushers blowing soap bubbles at worshipers." We need...

III The Perfecting of the Saints - Ephesians 4:11-13

1. The apostle Paul amplifies this truth in his letter to the Church at Ephesus. He stressed the perfecting of the saints in verse 12. The word "perfecting" comes from a Greek root word the means "fully grown". The gifted men (leaders) equipped the saints to do the work of the ministry. Again the work includes evangelism and edification. Edification can only be done one with another; the Greek word is "koinonia" it means fellowship. Man was not created to be alone. God said, It is not good for man to be alone. People were made for fellowship therefore we need each other, and we need to faithfully come together to edify one another.

2. Paul's letter to the Romans includes the most extensive "one another" profile. There are seven basic "one another" statements in chapters 12 to 16.

Do we reflect a community of believers who care for one another and one's community?

3. You always hear people say, "Well I don't want to join the church there's too many hypocrites." The local tavern listens to my problems and troubles. The bar is Satan's counterfeit of what Christ wants to give His church. The bar dispenses alcohol rather than the gospel call. It offers escape rather than grace and excepts permissiveness over righteous but this won't satisfy your soul. **The reality is that Satan works hard against the church to provide a counterfeit.** We are not providing the nature of the church Jesus wants us to.

But still, the true church is far better than any other organization, association or institution on the face of the earth. It moves toward being like Jesus Christ, because it represents Him in the world, because its life is energized by the Holy Spirit, because it lives under the instruction of the Word of God, because it applies spiritual power mutually through fellowship and service among its members. It therefore is the greatest association, organization, institution in the face of the earth.

Conclusion:

You know the New Testament teaches us to possess a personal faith in Jesus Christ, it says nothing at all about a private faith. We need other believers, and other believers need us (Hebrews 10:24-25). Let's enjoy and contribute to the strength and fellowship of the unified body of Christ. An effective church will demonstrate the good sense of love, fellowship, cooperation, caring and unity in the Holy Spirit.

A number of characteristics are required before an institution can be properly called a church. These include such things as Pastors and deacons who oversee the congregation. We will endeavor to examine these principles in the following weeks.