

Discovering our Purpose

What God receives through the church

Intro: We began this series on the purpose-driven church with a simple question: What purpose drives this congregation? We have sought to answer that question by taking a look at God's purpose for the church as a whole or His purpose for each individual believer as taught by Paul in Ephesians.

When God created the world He wanted to bring many sons to glory. All that he has done in history has been working toward that time when His son Jesus Christ would come into the world to be a sacrifice for our sins and His Spirit would come to His church to empower them to reveal the gospel to the world and to live in keeping with His purposes. The church is the product of God's purpose. Through the blood of Jesus and the revelation of the Spirit we have been reconciled to God and united in one body. God wants us to hold to those things that brought us together and to help each other toward the character and the lifestyle that is worthy of our calling as Christians. In a word he wants us to like his son! That means that we do not walk as the world, but that we are renewed in His image, engaging in the "good works" which he prepared for us. The result is a life of honesty, self-control, hard work, sound speech, love, and purity. It transforms our value system and goals in life. And it changes how we view our roles as husbands, wives, parents or children. It changes the way we conducted ourselves on our jobs. As a people, then, we constitute the army of the Lord in this world, armed with the panoply of God and in His strength, we stand firm for truth and righteousness in a world of corruption and confusion. What an amazing vision Paul creates! What a challenge for all of us to live each day.

But...we've considered this subject primarily from what God wants to give us and what He wants us to do. But, what does God hope to receive from all this? Do we meet some need of God? Does He depend upon us to provide something for Him? What is the ultimate objective of all God's purpose for and actions toward man? Why did He purpose and redeem the church?

God did not purpose and redeem the church to supply some need of His that goes unmet without us!

Cf. Ac. 17:24

God is sufficient in Himself. He existed eternally without us. The relationship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is perfect and does not need additional beings to make it so.

Yet God did create the world and human beings in it. When they fell, he planned a way of redemption for them. He brought into being a group of people who belong to him, the church of Christ. Why? We can find the answer in part in Ephesians.

God purposed and redeemed the church because of who He is.

He is a God of love and kindness (1:5) Love seeks out objects to love and to be loved in return. In this love, he acted in saving us from our sins (2:4-5).

Perhaps, it might be like asking someone who is married, “Why did you get married?” And you answer, “Because I loved this person”. Why did you love others? I just do; it is a part of my nature to do so. It might be like asking a parent, “Why did you have children?” And you answer, “We wanted to enlarge our own love by sharing it with a child.” Did you know what kind of children they would be? No. Had you known would you have had them?

And so God sought out objects of His love who would respond to him. Let’s go back again to our marriage illustration: If I were to ask, “Why did you love this person?” Because I saw in him/her qualities that were attractive to me and drew me to them.

The interesting thing about God’s love is that it was lavished upon those who were not worthy of it. God purposed and redeemed the church because He is also a God of grace and mercy (2:5; 1:7)

And so God purposed and redeemed the church because of who He is.

God purposed and redeemed the church because he wanted others to know and appreciate who He is.

He wanted to make known his “manifold” wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (2:10).

There is in the spiritual realm a host of beings created by God (angels of all degrees of power and glory). They are fascinated with the work of God on earth (1 Pet. 1:12) As they watch God work they are given the privilege of seeing His manifold wisdom in the church and they are constantly enjoying what He is doing and praising Him.

But what happens in heaven also happens on earth.

Whenever God works in us he changes us into channels of blessing to others. By our faithful performance of His will he brings joy, peace, healing, order, and help to all humanity. And the world, seeing that, acknowledges that it is God’s doing! And through us others are led to honor and worship Him. Mt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12

Have you ever thought about the word “glorify” and how the Bible speaks of how we glorify God? We cannot make God more loving, more gracious or more powerful than He is. His glory shines with a luster that man cannot augment. When we glorify God, we don’t add to His glory. We only call attention to it! We only encourage others to see what is already there! So everyday we have a chance to help others to know and appreciate God.

God purposed and redeemed the church because He wanted to bring praise to Himself

Cf. 1:6,12,14 3:20-21

Such phrases may puzzle us for they make it appear that God has some need to be flattered or continuously complimented.

Are we to conclude that God possesses some kind of insatiable egotism such that He must have people speaking of His good points all the time? That He must have a worship service going all the time in His honor? Such commands would seem to be out of place for a humble God that commands humility and abhors and resists pride.

Yet, even when God seeks praise, he is not asking men to supply something that He needs, but He is supplying something that man needs!

Think with me for a moment. Have you ever noticed that our moments of highest joy and pleasure evoke praise? We can't be content to simply see it ourselves. We want to point it out to others and talk about it. It's a part of the pleasure that we must display. And so we are riding down the highway and we see a beautiful harvest moon, large and yellow come above the horizon and my wife says, "Look at that beautiful moon". Or late in the afternoon we are headed for home and we see in our rear view mirror the multiple colors of a sunset. And we say, "Look at that. Isn't it beautiful?"

That's exactly what worship and praise is all about. In Scripture we see people who have caught a glimpse of the beauty, the love, the power, the greatness of God and they are reveling in the delight of knowing Him and they cannot hold it in. They say, "Praise the Lord!" They say, "Worship the Lord".

They are not saying, God is so egotistical that He must always be complimented by us. They are saying God wants us to know Him and knowing Him will lead us to express our joy and reverence in words and deeds of worship! Or as CS Lewis once put it, "God's command that we worship is really the invitation to enjoy Him." And that is what praise is all about. Has your praise today been a manifestation of your own appreciation and joy in God? If not, it's not praise at all!!! And so, God did all he did "to the praise of His glory". This praise is not given because God needs it, but because we do!

Thursday night I happened to catch a few moments of an interview between Shawn Hannity (talk show host) and Larry Flint (publisher of Hustler Magazine). The subject was Flint's ongoing belief that all moral conservatives are inwardly corrupt and hypocritical; and thus, in order to prove that, he has offered huge sums of money to anyone who will help him expose the private misdeeds of those who publicly profess their morality. Flint's hostility is especially directed toward professing Christians. He admitted that he himself once had been a believer, but his last words were "I got over it". How sad!

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not praise and worship God because He needs it; but because we do. And when we "get over it", we miss the opportunity to know the greatest being we could ever know and miss the greatest joy we could ever feel! We miss the joy of seeing Him in all His love, grace, and power. Instead we can only adore the creation He

made and ignore Him, the Creator of everything. Like children whose eyes light up at the sight of the new toy on Christmas day and race away with it, forgetting about the loving grandparent who gave it to us, so are men who fail to honor God. But when we for the first time really really see God in all His love and power and glory we won't ever "get over it"!!!!

What does God get out of it all? Only the delight of knowing that His creatures have known Him and love Him just as He has loved us!

Conclusion: And so fulfilling God's purpose enables us to "glorify God". We are able to see from our own lives the blessing of His work in us and we are moved by it to praise Him for a wisdom far greater than our own, and to love Him for a love that we didn't deserve.

About Larry Flint: He "got over it"; but only temporarily.