

“The Church on Purpose is Growing!”

Matthew 16:16-18

Intro. – I couldn’t believe what I heard. An elder in the church where I was serving said a person in the church had said to him earlier that week, “We just want our friendly, little church back.” Ben Merold, retired preacher would have an immediate response to that declaration: “There is no such thing as a friendly, little church.” He would go on to explain that if a local church is truly friendly, it would not be little very long.

Do you desire the church you are a part of to grow? We all know the Lord desires His church to grow. He said so in our text: “*I will build My Church...*” But, do you desire the church here to grow?

Following statistics aren’t new, but illus. my point: 95% all churches in US don’t want to grow. 5% do. Same piece says all churches in the US only 5% are growing and 95% are “holding their own or declining.”

A dad was reading the evening paper when he heard a commotion outside. It was his little daughter playing with her friends. But the noise got louder, more heated and more argumentative, until finally the dad could take no more. He the door and said, “Stop it! Honey, what’s wrong out here?” After this reprimand the daughter quickly responded, “But, Daddy, we were just playing church.”

My point? Our Lord wants His church to grow! The real question is do YOU want the Lord’s church to grow? You and I need to let the Lord’s church grow. You need to do your part. I need to do my part.

Purpose: to better understand the principle that a church on purpose is a growing church

Joe Ellis, teacher at Cincinnati Bible Seminary wrote: “The churches that are in trouble are oriented toward preserving human traditions or toward maintaining themselves as institutions, rather than toward accomplishing significant spiritual objectives... Much of the current dissatisfaction and disillusionment with churches grows out of the fact that people perceive much of the activity as pointless.”

This got me to thinking, “What are we doing here at the Church of Christ that suggests pointlessness to the church family AND to the community/surrounding area. Is our purpose as a local church clear and sharp or is it vague and hazy? The following two points will help answer these questions and accomplish our purpose:

I HURDLES TO CONSTANTLY OVERCOME

A. Fixation with Money

1. Many churches are more interested in saving dollars and cents than in saving souls...
2. Often churches’ main concern never goes beyond budgets, bills and balances = too internalized...
 - a. illus. – Joe Ellis asked: “If an extra terrestrial visited a monthly “board/leadership meeting” what would they conclude the purpose local church to be?”
 - b. know a church had a debt (building “Family Life Center”) that missions, Bible School material etc. sacrificed... 2 hrs. of foreclosure...
3. Good way to address fixation with money is to teach/preach/practice Biblical stewardship...
4. Show me a church who understands God’s grace... and I’ll show you a church with \$ for ministry!

B. Wrong Emphasis in Leadership

1. Often church leadership is a joke... emphasis is on *status* and not *service*; *control* and not *caring*; *authority* and not being *authentic*; *power* and not *responsibility*; *prestige* and not *humility*...
2. Leaders in the local church must readily recognize that “authority” is wrapped up not in one’s clout/influence, but in their willingness to be a servant. Emphasis in NT elders/pastors is all about *responsibility* and being an *example*... NOT power, authority and one-upmanship!
3. Speaking at the last Northman this year – preaching on the importance of leadership in local church – can’t say it enough “no church will ever rise above its leadership”...
4. Preachers/evangelists being *pastorized* = CEO concept being embraced everywhere... What did Paul tell Timothy to do? “*Do the work of an evangelist... Preach the Word... Be instant in season and out of season... reprove, rebuke exhort...*”
5. The concept of putting men in places of leadership to keep them “interested and involved” is contrary to God and His Word. Can’t afford to have the wrong emphasis in leadership!

C. Reversing the End for the Means

1. Traditionalism – Ralph Neighbour summed up the problem of tradition becoming more important than accomplishing the real purpose of Lord’s church: *The Seven Last Words of the Church: We Never Tried It That Way Before.*
 - a. Illus. – military officer once remarked that he felt more danger trying to change procedures in the Pentagon than what he found on the battlefield.
 - b. traditions are not bad... but when they become more important than God’s will we have reversed the ends for the means = “Bureaucracy defends the status quo long past the time when the quo has lost its status.”
 - c. like habits, traditions can be harmless and even genuinely productive of purpose. Traditionalism, however insists upon maintaining the tradition even if it is counterproductive.
 - d. traditions must be subject to two conditions: 1) must be recognized as traditions and not confused with mandates of God; 2) maintaining them must contribute, not interfere with accomplishing the will of God = principles never change... but methods do...
2. Institutionalism – People often refer to the local church they are a part as “their” church or “our” church... In reality any faithful local church is the Lord’s Church – Ephesians 5:25 “...*Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*”
 - a. when it comes to the worship/service in this local church, when it gets right down to it, it’s not about you, it’s not about me our preferences, our desires... What ultimately matters is THIS IS THE LORD’S CHURCH = His preferences/desires must always take precedence...
 - b. Illus. – “favorites” = preferences of music styles will vary... dress will vary... order of worship... color of paint etc. etc. etc. – Point: we get so involved with trying to please or not offend each other, we forget about the Lord’s preferences... favorites...
 - c. Joe Ellis: “When congregations slip into maintenance or survival as their goal (i.e. institutionalism), they sign their death notices. Even though they may continue to exist as institutions long after they have died as genuine churches.”
 - d. churches who hold to firmly to the Lord’s purpose for its reason of being, is marked with commitment, vitality, enthusiasm and fruitfulness for Christ!

D. Disobedience to God’s Will

1. Church closed out East – sign on building said “Closed for Business” = never knew its business!
2. Great Commission is still the “Great Commission” = MAKE DISCIPLES
3. My point? When we’re disobedient to God’s Word how can we expect His blessings?
4. There are troubles on the horizon (authority of Scriptures... baptism is optional... Bible Colleges being everything but... roles of men and women...
5. Yogi Berra said right – “Don’t make the wrong mistakes.” – We as a local church must avoid these hurdles. How? By keeping on purpose as His Church in this area!

II APSECTS TO CONSTANTLY IMPROVE

A. Biblical Elders

1. Men who are Biblically qualified and are desirous of being true pastors in the Lord’s Church
2. Men leading by *example* and not with iron fists... must commend present elders here...
3. Men more intent upon God’s will than their own will...
4. Men willing to take *risks*, willing to launch forward knowing assuredly the following:
 - a. Isaiah 55:11 “*So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*”
 - b. Romans 8:31 “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*”

B. Supportive Church Family

1. David Robinson recently retired from a storied NBA career. Prior to this he played for Navy. One game with Kentucky he scored 40 points. Played a phenomenal game, but lost!

- a. no church can be built around one man... preachers can't be Xtian for everyone else...
- b. Christ is Head = Christocracy not a democracy or republic...
- 2. No church can afford the "luxury" of division = Body with each part doing its part = productive!
 - a. Satan's 2 greatest thrust = 1) diversion... 2) division...
 - b. our greatest tool for evangelism is our unity = Restoration Movement = Unity basis X's Word
- 3. Warm and loving fellowship – eggs are hatched in an incubator not a refrigerator...

C. A God Empowered Body

- 1. Someone said, "If God ever went out of business most churches would never know difference."
- 2. Not talking mystical or emotional approach... -- am talking a Biblical approach – we have something greater than a miracle (John 14) – the taking of the Gospel of grace to the lost...
- 3. Do our part and be confident God will do His – plant, water Gospel seed and God will what?

Conclusion: Difference between swamp and millrace illust. the effect of being on purpose. A relatively small quantity of water can set a large waterwheel in motion which in turn powers machinery... The key is in the narrow channeling of the water and the precision with which it strikes the wheel. A swamp, on the other hand, may contain a vast quantity of water, but will accomplish nothing because it's directionless, aimless, stagnant.

Is the Church of Christ in Eaton illustrated best by a millrace or a swamp? Local churches fall into one or the other of these categories. Some are reaching out while others are passive. Some have direction while others are directionless. Some are ever moving forward while others are merely existing.

Point? Great churches always take God's purposes seriously. They take the Great Commission to heart. They believe God intends to do not just good things, but great things through them!

I conclude with three mottos for every faithful church/Christian:

- 1) *Whatever It Takes!* – such is the way great people/churches develop unto God's glory...
- 2) *Why Not?!* – Whenever negative/small thinking rears its ugly head to discourage bold ventures for the Lord's work, this question ought to be asked...
- 3) *There's A Way, Let's Find It!* – this attitude refuses to admit the impossibility of whatever needs to be undertaken for the success of God's will; after all, "If God be for us who can be against us."