

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-21 The Church's Purpose

What is a church planter? Farmers are people who plant seeds in good soil and water their fields. God provides the sun and rain to give the new plants what they need to grow. The plants produce grain or beans or other crops. Church planters are people who plant the Word and grow churches. The first church was born on the Day of Pentecost. Soon, the Twelve found that the work of ministering to more than 3,000 people was heavy. In fact, it was more than they could do. So they decided to appoint seven men to serve widows and take care of other ministries of the growing church. These deacons followed the example of Jesus—praying for the sick, feeding the hungry, preaching, and doing miracles in his name. One of these deacons, Stephen, became the first martyr of the church.

Now the apostle Paul was a church planter. He planted the seed of the Word of God, watered it with tears, and believed for a harvest of souls. The Book of Acts tells the story of Paul's three missionary journeys. He planted first-century churches in places that are in the modern countries of Turkey, Greece, and Italy. Many of the books of the New Testament are Paul's letters to feed and nurture these newly-planted churches. Some of these were sent to the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Thessalonica, and Galatia. Paul also wrote letters to his 'sons' in ministry, like Timothy and Titus.

Our lesson today discusses the purpose of the Church. Our tenth **Statement of Faith** gives us four purposes of the Church. These are: 1) to evangelize the world, 2) to worship God, 3) to encourage believers to grow to become like Christ, and 4) to show God's love and compassion to the world. The New Testament clarifies these four purposes of the Church.

1. What instructions do we find in the New Testament for evangelizing the world? Just before Christ returned to heaven after his resurrection, he gave the disciples a very important assignment. He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). We call this the 'Great Commission.' Jesus instructed his disciples in Acts 1:8 to be filled with the Holy Spirit and then to be witnesses in Jerusalem (their home city), Judea and Samaria (other cities and states nearby), and to the farthest corners of the world (other countries).

Paul wrote in to the church in Rome, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:13-15). The Antioch church sent out Paul and Barnabas to preach. The Jerusalem church sent Peter and John to Samaria for ministry. Today there are many churches who plant 'daughter' churches.

2. Worship was the second important part of the New Testament church and the church today. Paul instructed believers, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18-20).

3. Thirdly, how does the church encourage spiritual growth? Paul wrote the Ephesian church that Christ “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). Some of the ways spiritual growth can take place are teaching new converts biblical principles, memorizing scripture, and sharing fellowship with other believers. Of course, “Praying continually and giving thanks in all circumstances” (1Thess 5:17), helps believers to mature. Jesus told us to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 29:19).

4. How does the church show God’s love and compassion to the world? Paul instructed the Galatian church to “remember the poor,” and “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal 2:10; 6:10). James adds that believers must “look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). These commands are being carried out all over the world by believers. They distribute food, take care of orphans, and shelter the homeless. Christians start drug rehab centers, clean water projects, hospitals, schools, and many other outreaches that offer hope to victims.

So the church must be diligent to evangelize, to worship God, to grow more like Christ, and to show his love to others.

After Paul planted a church, he always left a mature leader in charge of it to encourage the spiritual growth of believers. The leader made sure that biblical principles were followed. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, Phoebe in Cenchrea, and overseers and deacons in Philippi. He later left Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete. He continued to mentor the leaders while he traveled. Even from prison he wrote letters of instruction and encouragement to them.

Paul describes the choosing of other men or women in the church to become deacons, elders, or pastors. Deacons were responsible for managing church business and giving to those in need. Overseers or elders were like pastors. Since the church met in homes, each city may have had several elders or pastors. In Romans 16 Paul greets 29 men and women who were his co-workers. As the co-laborers helped to plant churches, they were being trained. They had traveled with Paul or had taught under his ministry. They then became the pastors and leaders who were ministers together with him.

God expects the Church to continue to follow New Testament principles and guidelines. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. He has given responsibility to church leaders, pastors, and teachers—both male and female. They are to continue the ministries given to them in evangelism, worship, discipleship, and compassion in today’s world.

Our Statement of Faith: “We believe the Church is the body of Christ with a divinely called ministry. Its purpose is to evangelize the world, worship God, encourage believers to grow in the likeness of Christ and show God’s love and compassion to the world.” **Our Memory Verse:** “In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom 12:5).

This lesson is **important** because it explains that the church is not just a place to gather together and enjoy God’s presence. The church has four main purposes. Believers must go out

into their world to evangelize, to lead worship, to make disciples, and to show God's love to those in need.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the purpose of the Church from the time of the Early Church to today, has not changed. It is to look outward, not inward. It is to be other-centered and not self-centered. God has a ministry for every believer to fulfill.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. List the four purposes of the Church. [Pause]
A. If you answered, "Evangelize the world, worship God, encourage believers to grow to become like Christ, and show God's love and compassion to the world," you are correct.
2. Name the five ministry gifts Christ gave to the church in Ephesians 4:11-13. [Pause.]
A. If you said apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers you are right.
3. What are some ways the church can show God's love and compassion to the world? [Pause.]
A. If you said such things as food distribution, orphanages, homeless shelters, drug rehab centers, clean water projects, abuse care centers, or hospitals, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to memorize our tenth *Statement of Faith*: "We believe the Church is the body of Christ with a divinely called ministry. Its purpose is to evangelize the world, worship God, encourage believers to grow in the likeness of Christ, and show God's love and compassion to the world." Learn the memory verse "In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:5). Share with other people your testimony and what being part of the Church means. Ask them what they understand the word 'church' to mean.

Review all ten *Statements of Faith* until you can say them from memory:

Statement #1: We believe the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God. They are the revelation of God to man, the unchanging rule of faith and conduct.

Statement #2: We believe the one true God has revealed himself as the eternal Creator of heaven and earth and the Savior of mankind. He has further revealed himself as one being in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Statement #3: We believe the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, as revealed in the Scriptures by his virgin birth, his sinless life, his miracles, his death on the Cross, his bodily resurrection from the dead, and his position at the right hand of God.

Statement #4: We believe that human beings were created in the image of God for a loving relationship with him. They chose to disobey God, however, and thus experienced physical death and separation from God.

Statement #5: We believe mankind's only hope of salvation is through the shed blood of Jesus, the Son of God. The gift of eternal life is received when we repent of our sins and confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Statement #6: We believe water baptism by immersion is commanded of all who repent and believe on Christ as Savior. Water baptism is a witness to the world that we have died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ.

Statement #7: We believe the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's suffering and death, and a prophecy of his Second Coming. Christ commanded all believers to take Communion until he comes.

Statement #8: We believe the baptism in the Holy Spirit, according to Acts 2:4, is given to empower a believer to witness and to live an overcoming Christian life.

Statement #9: We believe sanctification is working with the Holy Spirit to separate ourselves from sin and to dedicate ourselves to God.

Statement #10: We believe the Church is the body of Christ with a divinely called ministry. Its purpose is to evangelize the world, worship God, encourage believers to grow in the likeness of Christ, and show God's love and compassion to the world.