

# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

Why do I come to church? What should I expect the local church to do for me? Should the regular services of the church be primarily for reaching the lost or for reaching the saved? Compare the two concepts below:

<p>The local church is primarily a <b>SOUL-WINNING STATION</b>.</p> <p>We rejoice at every soul that is saved through the preaching ministry of a local church, and we certainly do not want to minimize the importance of making the most of every opportunity to win a soul for Christ, but the primary purpose of the local assembly is to build up the believers in the most holy faith and to equip them for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).</p>	<p>The local church is primarily a <b>SOUL-BUILDING STATION</b> (Acts 20:28,32).</p>
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<p>The local church is here primarily to <b>GET PEOPLE SAVED</b> (Reaching them).</p> <p>If the main thrust of the local assembly is to reach the lost, then evangelism will be unduly stressed and given priority and the edification and equipping of believers will not be given its proper place. If God's Word is properly taught, the unsaved who are in attendance will certainly hear the gospel, and the believers who need to be taught will not be neglected.</p>	<p>The local church is here primarily to <b>GET PEOPLE TAUGHT</b> (Teaching them). See Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:42.</p>
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<p>The local church is to <b>PREACH THE GOSPEL</b> (by "gospel" we mean that truth which unsaved people need to know in order to be saved, the good news of salvation).</p> <p>If a faithful pastor is preaching through the Bible, verse by verse, book by book, he is going to be constantly pointing his listeners to Christ and to His so-great salvation. At the same time he will be feeding the saints the kind of spiritual food that will nurture them and strengthen them to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>The local church is to <b>PREACH THE WORD</b> (2 Tim. 4:2) which would include the gospel but which would not neglect "ALL SCRIPTURE" (2 Tim. 3:16).</p>
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The local church is here primarily for **EVANGELISM** (Win them!).

The local church is here primarily for **INDOCTRINATION** (Feed them!).  
See John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2.

The key word here is “primarily.” We are not opposed to the gospel message going forth in the regular services of the local church, and we certainly rejoice over every sinner who repents. The problem comes when evangelism becomes the main focus and the believers do not get the spiritual nourishment that they need to be effective servants (and soul-winners!) for Christ throughout the week.

**BRING THE UNSAVED TO THE GOSPEL.**

**BRING THE GOSPEL TO THE UNSAVED**  
(Mark 16:15; 2 Cor. 5:20).

God does not say, “Go into all the world and invite everyone to come to church.” We are not to bring them to the gospel but we are to bring the gospel to them. All believers are to be gospel preachers, not just the pastor on Sunday morning or Sunday evening. Our gospel emphasis should be every day of the week, as we go into the world seeking the lost to win. But the hours that we spend with God’s people should be rich times of being built up in the Word of God so that we can be more effective witnesses for Christ at work, at home or at school.

The regular services of the local church have a ministry primarily for **SINNERS**.

The regular services of the local church have a ministry primarily for **SAINTS**  
(Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:28).

Again the key word is “primarily.” We are certainly glad if unsaved people can come into a local church and find it a place that ministers to their spiritual needs, especially their greatest need which is salvation from sin. But the primary purpose of the local assembly is to proclaim the whole counsel of God so that believers are well-equipped to go forth and do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).

Primary goal of the local church:  
**THAT PEOPLE MIGHT BE SAVED!**

(Salvation is the final goal)

Primary goal of the local church:  
**THAT SAVED PEOPLE MIGHT BE CHRIST-LIKE!**

(Salvation is just the first step)  
Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:13-15

Again, we are certainly not opposed to people being saved in church, but we are grieved when God’s people are undernourished, spiritually sick, and ineffective witnesses for Christ. A church that is faithfully teaching the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, will not neglect the lost who come through the doors. What happens when an unbeliever comes into a soul-building station where believers are being edified and where God’s Word is being rightly taught?  
See 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

The Pastor should  
**PREACH SALVATION MESSAGES.**  
John 3:16, etc.

The Pastor should  
**PREACH THE ENTIRE BIBLE** from  
Genesis to Revelation.  
(Acts 20:27; Matt. 28:20; 2 Tim. 3:16)

It is impossible to preach through the Bible systematically and not touch upon the gospel repeatedly. There is a scarlet cord that runs throughout the Scriptures. But there are also rich gems of truth that believers need to hear and understand. John 3:16 is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, but a steady diet of John 3:16 type messages is not what a hungry believer needs. If we aim the Sword only at the unsaved, then we are going to fail to meet the spiritual needs of God's flock (John 21:15-17).

The Pastor should give the people  
**INFORMATION ON  
HOW TO BE SAVED.**  
(How to become a Christian)

The Pastor should give the people  
**INFORMATION ON  
HOW TO LIVE.**  
(How to be a Christian) See 2 Tim. 3:17

Believers need to be well-versed on how to be saved and how to have full assurance of salvation based on God's Word. But salvation is only the beginning. It is but the first step of a life-long process of growing to be more like Christ (2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:18). What would we think of a person who is admitted into medical school but receives no further medical training because all the medical school cares about is getting more and more people admitted into their school? I would not want to be a patient in the hospital staffed by such people! The prospective doctor needs to receive the best training possible so that he might be able to treat people properly and save lives. So also the pastor's job is to give the saints the best possible training from the Word so that they might be able to minister effectively and represent Christ rightly in the world, bringing others to the Saviour.

**THE PASTOR DOES THE WORK OF  
THE MINISTRY.**

**THE SAINTS DO THE WORK OF THE  
MINISTRY** (Eph. 4:12).

In most churches today the pastor bears the great bulk of the ministry load along with perhaps a few others. The great majority are content to sit in the pews, hear a nice message and perhaps come back on the following Sunday. The genius of New Testament Christianity was that the saints (the believers) were to be fully equipped and well-trained to go forth every day of the week and do the work of the ministry. Instead of one man or a few people trying to bear the burden, God's intent was to have a whole army of believers going forth trained and well-equipped to serve the Lord at work, at school, at home, in town or in the local neighborhoods.

**THE PASTOR IS THE MINISTER.****ALL ARE MINISTERS** (Eph. 4:12).

In so many churches the preacher is called “the minister,” and sadly this title itself reflects the wrong concept. The pastor is certainly a servant of Christ, but he is but one of many. His special assignment is to train and equip a whole group of believers to be faithful servants of Christ, and this would include being faithful heralds of the good news.

If someone were to ask, “Who is the minister of this church?” an appropriate answer would be, “There are about 200 (depending on the size of the congregation) ministers in this church. Which one would you like to speak to?” God’s people need to understand that the Saviour desires everyone of us to be His faithful servants.

On the other hand, the pastor has a very special ministry. He is able to devote himself continually to the ministry of prayer and the Word of God (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 4:15-16). The believers under his ministry ought to be good students of the Word also, but because they hold full time jobs and are full time homemakers, etc., the time they spend in the Word is limited by such constraints. The pastor has the time and needs to make the time for intensive study of the Word so that he might be able to equip the believers unto every good work. One of the great problems of our day is that Bible believing pastors do not study the Word as they should, and part of the reason for this is that all during the week they are running around doing many of the things that well-fed and well-taught saints ought to be doing.

**THE PASTOR IS IN FULL TIME CHRISTIAN SERVICE.****EVERY BELIEVER IS IN FULL TIME CHRISTIAN SERVICE**

(1 Cor. 6:19-20; Col. 3:22-25).

Every believer needs to realize that he is in full time Christian service whether he gets monetary benefits or not. You may be a doctor or a lawyer or a plumber or an insurance agent or whatever, but your **chief vocation** is that you are a servant of the most high God and you are to walk worthy of your high, holy and heavenly calling (Eph. 4:1). Never forget what your main job really is. And if it really is your main job, do you not need to be fully equipped and fully trained for it? This is the purpose of the local assembly of believers according to God’s blueprint in Ephesians 4:11-16.

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**THE PASTOR IS THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL.**

**EVERY BELIEVER IS A PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL (2 Cor. 5:20; Mark 16:15).**

The pastor certainly has wonderful opportunities to proclaim the good news of Christ, not only in the regular services of the church, but also on other special occasions (funerals, weddings, etc.). As the pastor faithfully preaches and teaches through the Bible he is going to repeatedly exalt the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and point to the wonderful salvation that He alone died to provide. But there is also a gospel responsibility given to every blood-bought child of God. Remember, your pastor cannot readily get into the factory or the hospital or the insurance company or the school or the place of business where you work 40 hours a week or more. However God has placed you there to be His witness, by life and by lips (Acts 1:8). Also keep in mind that you don't have to be a pastor to hand out tracts or to do hospital visitation or to lead a nursing home service or to conduct a neighborhood evangelistic Bible study or to teach a Bible club for children, or to go on door to door visitation, etc. May God guide each of us to know where and how we may most effectively serve Him.

### **Ephesians 4:11-12**

The ascended Lord Jesus Christ gave certain gifted men to His church, including pastor-teachers (Eph. 4:11). The following may help you understand what Ephesians 4:12 is really saying:

WHY WERE THESE GIFTED MEN GIVEN TO THE CHURCH?

**For the purpose of (Greek—pros, with a view towards)**

**perfecting (equipping, training) the saints**

[What are the saints equipped for?]

**1. FOR (Greek: eis) the work of the ministry**

[SERVING CHRIST EVERY DAY (including evangelism)]

**2. FOR (Greek: eis) the edifying of the body of Christ**

[BUILDING UP FELLOW BELIEVERS!]

***Interpretive Paraphrase:*** The Pastor-teacher is to equip and train the saints (through a program of total indoctrination involving the whole counsel of God from Genesis to Revelation) so that the saints will go forth throughout the week serving Christ, making known His gospel and building up fellow believers.

# THE PURPOSE FOR THE ASSEMBLING OF THE SAINTS

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

(Ephesians 4:11-12)

The saints assemble together in order to be equipped (perfected) for the work of the ministry. This is the genius of apostolic Christianity, but it is rarely taking place in the churches today. God’s purpose is to train and equip His people by way of His gifted men (“pastor/teachers” etc.). When believers are well-fed and well-taught in the whole counsel of God, then the body (the local assembly) will be healthy, the LIFE of Christ will be manifested, and God will be glorified.

We certainly thank God for every sinner who attends a local assembly of believers, hears the gospel message and receives Christ as his personal Saviour. The main purpose of the local assembly, however, is for the saints, not for sinners. The local assembly, according to God’s pattern, is to be primarily an edification center (1 Cor. 14:26), not an evangelistic center; a soul-building station (Acts 20:28,32), not a soul-winning station. Of course, if the whole counsel of God is preached and if the Bible is faithfully taught then the cross of Christ, the grace of God, justification and God’s so-great salvation would be themes heard repeatedly. How can you preach the Word and not preach the gospel? On the other hand, it is possible to preach the gospel in such a way that fails to provide proper nourishment for the saints. Believers need more than a steady diet of “John 3:16 messages.”

Interestingly enough, the cults do not establish evangelistic centers. Rather they establish edificational centers to train their people to go out and do the work of the ministry. The people are immersed in a program of total indoctrination. The average Jehovah’s Witness, for example, is ready always to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason of the *false* hope that is within him. The average Bible believer is horribly ignorant of God’s truth. The devil knows which system really works. The cults do not lack for converts.

What do unbelievers notice as they come into local churches today? Do they see a healthy organism? Do they see well-fed members? Do they see “Christ in you”? Are they convicted by the awesome Presence and Person of God (1 Cor. 14:24-25)? The greatest need today is for a lost world to see the Lord Jesus Christ manifesting Himself in and through a healthy assembly of believers. The world needs to see Christ-like believers who understand and practice God’s Word. When God’s people are fully equipped for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16), they certainly will not be lax in gospel outreach, nor allow mission programs to suffer. When a church makes its priority edification, then true evangelism cannot help but be enhanced, as is well illustrated in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

*The local church is for the glory of God. On earth each congregation is to function as a body that evidences the power and indwelling of the life of God. Each one is to be seen as a manifestation of Christ in its locality, living the truth as well as preaching it. The bulk of instruction and exhortations in Acts and the Epistles has to do with holiness and honorable interpersonal relationships in the local church (1 Cor. 11:27). Each congregation is to see itself as a “body,” and organism, and not merely as an organization....Unless this is understood and made paramount in the thinking of leaders and members, the local church will fail as a witness. But when this truth is embraced by faith unto edification, the community round about will see a witness. The unsaved who attend its services will come under the conviction of sin (1 Cor. 14:25), and the members will be fed, empowered, and equipped to properly represent Jesus Christ in their daily pursuits (2 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 2:15)....The redeemed—together as the Lord’s assembly—constitute an organism to be treasured. Each believer should be helped to see what the local assembly means to Christ and should become most appreciative of the precious privilege of being part of the local testimony. --Carlton Helgerson, The Local Church*