

Purposes of the Church

We know a church is an assembly. We know that an assembly trying to function as what we call a church has several distinguishing marks. However, what is the actual purpose of assembling?

Ministry to God

COLOSSIANS 3:15-16 – Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of *one body* you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you *sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God*.

EPHESIANS 5:18-20 – Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. *Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

There are a number of things that can happen when people assemble. We see a contrast here between drunkenness and debauchery (which can happen in more worldly assemblies) and being filled with the Spirit. Being Spirit-filled results in singing and thankfulness to God.

Therefore, our first purpose of assembling should be directed to God.

Questions for us to reflect on

- What is your view on singing? Is it something we do just to set the mood or is it integral to the act of assembling?
 - Do we need to sing at every assembly?
 - What other ways can we give thanks to God?
 - Have you ever felt “filled with the Spirit”? Can you describe what it was like?
 - When you assemble is praising and giving thanks to God on your mind, or is something else?
- (See next section for other possible reasons).

Ministry to Local Believers

COLOSSIANS 1:28 – We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may *present everyone perfect in Christ*.

EPHESIANS 4:11-13 – It was he who 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 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.

Part of the reason for assembling is to build up the members of that assembly. There is an expectation that people will grow and mature. This requires relationships which in turn require time spent together.

Therefore, our second purpose of assembling should be directed to the Local Believers in that assembly.

More questions for us to reflect on

- What does it mean to be “perfect in Christ”? Are we allowed to fail?
- Do you assemble with an attitude of growing and maturing?
- What is a “work of service”? Why do we have them? Do you perform one or more?
- Is growth of all the believers in the assembly on your heart, or just your own personal growth? Is it possible to balance the two?

Ministry to the World (Believers and non-Believers)

MATTHEW 28:19 – Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Declaring the gospel is the primary ministry the church has towards the world. But also consider:

ACTS 11:29 – The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:3-4 – For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

1 JOHN 3:17 – If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Believers outside the local congregation can be served. A literal “service to the saints”. Though what about non-believers?

LUKE 6:35-36 – But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

There appears to be no limit on those we can help as an assembly.

Therefore, our third purpose of assembling should be directed to the wider world.

More questions for us to reflect on

- In what ways can we spread the gospel?
- In what ways can we serve the wider community of believers?
- In what ways can we serve the wider non-believing community?
- Are there things we shouldn't get involved in under the guise of serving? E.g. politics, civic duties, etc. If so, why?

Summary

An assembly needs a purpose. The three identified are not contradictory but do emphasise different aspects of ministry. Ministry to God, to local believers, and to the world.

What would a church look like that focused on one purpose at the expense of the others? There needs to be balance. Remember we assemble at different times in different places and in varying sizes. This is not a Sunday only thing. Over the course of all our assemblies, how are we doing on balancing these purposes?