



JESUS' CHURCH: MISSION

Other distinguishing marks of Jesus' church could be mentioned,¹ but I will discuss only one more. Then I will wrap up this part of our study.

THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

The church is a divine institution with a divine mission. Jesus once defined His mission in these words: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). His church has the same purpose. Many goals are important, but only one is imperative: going to heaven. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26a).

The church's challenge to "save that which [is] lost" can be divided into at least three responsibilities:

(1) *Evangelism*. The word "evangelize" means "to tell the good news [about Jesus]." The charge to evangelize was given in Jesus' Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

... "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16).

Every Christian should teach those he meets about Jesus and His way.

(2) *Edification*. The word "edify" means "to build up." Christians are to build one another up

by teaching and encouragement. One place this challenge is found is in Ephesians 4:15, 16:

... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up [or, edifying] of itself in love.

(3) *Benevolence*: The word "benevolence" refers to helping others because we "wish them well." Benevolence usually involves the supplying of needs, including physical needs such as food and clothing. Many New Testament passages speak of the responsibility to help others.

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10).

It is easy for a church—any church—to get sidetracked into a multiplicity of activities and to forget its God-given mission.

A CHALLENGE TO YOU

In order for our study together to be effective, it must be personal and practical. I want you to review the six lessons on Jesus' church (including this one). Then I would like for you to compare some religious organization with what the New Testament teaches about the Lord's church. For the purposes of this exercise, it does not matter which religious organization you choose.

(It can be one you like or one you do not like.) This is an exercise to encourage you to be discriminating. To help you in your comparison, you may first want to make a list of questions.

You will want to ask general questions like these:

- Is this a God-fearing church that believes in God, Jesus, and the Bible?
- Is this church committed to pleasing God and strengthening men?

You will want to ask specific questions relating to our studies:

- Does this church wear a scriptural designation?
- Is this church organized scripturally?
- Are its preachers called “pastors”? Do they wear unscriptural titles such as “Reverend”?
- Does this church worship scripturally? Does it observe the Lord’s Supper on the first day of every week? Does it use only vocal music in its worship?

As you make your list of questions, do not neglect those that relate to a church’s heart. Jesus said,

... “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew

22:37–39).

You will want to work and worship where you will be encouraged to obey commandments like these.

As one last part of this exercise, compare your list with a local church of Christ. Churches of Christ claim to have restored the church of the first century. Churches of Christ claim to “speak where the Bible speaks” and to “be silent where the Bible is silent.” Challenge their claims (Acts 17:11).

CONCLUSION

Jesus’ church was part of “the eternal purpose” of God (Ephesians 3:10, 11). “The manifold wisdom of God” is “made known through the church” (Ephesians 3:10). God’s glory shines in the church (Ephesians 3:21). The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). I hope our study of the church has made you appreciate it more. It is one of God’s wonderful and remarkable provisions.

It is important to identify the Lord’s church today and to be part of it. Is the multiplicity of churches in existence confusing? Yes. Is it easy to find Jesus’ church in the midst of the confusion? No. Nevertheless, with God’s help, you can do it. Have the positive attitude of Paul, who said, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). ❖

¹Distinguishing marks of the Lord’s church could include when and where it was established (Acts 2) and its emphasis on the oneness of the church (John 17:20, 21; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13; Ephesians 4:4–6).

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