

Why Church? #3

What are the Valid Activities of the Church? (what do we do that makes church church?)

From the previous lessons:

1. *Regular meetings (by tradition on Sundays)*
2. *Recognized leadership (pastors, deacons, teachers, etc.)*
3. *Reading, preaching and teaching of the Word*
4. *Discipleship training*

Our purpose here is not to say everything that can be said about any of these activities, but merely to identify, from scripture, the activities of the church. From these we should be able to see more clearly what is the purpose of the church, and then compare ourselves to this. That is, how do the actual activities and purposes of churches today compare with what we see in the Bible? We cannot expect any church to be successful in God's eyes if we do not conform to what He intends the church to be.

5. Worship

Music is one of the things common to all churches, although the styles and means of worship varies widely. Most people instinctively think of worship as music, but there is more to it than that. Not all music is worship, and not all worship is music.

Even beyond today's disagreements between traditional and modern worship, compare the music of the Gregorian chants with the acapello singing of some groups today, or the organ music of J. S. Bach with "Southern Gospel". There are all kinds of music forms that can be used for worship, although some are more, and some less suitable.

That music and worship is a central part of church life is nothing new. The Psalms are filled with musical worship, and there were whole groups of people in OT worship whose jobs were solely in worship – singers and musicians in regular and organized worship.

Ps. 95:1-2 – "O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms."

Ps. 96:1-2, 7-9 – "O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name: shew forth his salvation from day to day. ... Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth."

Musical worship continued to be a part of the NT church.

1 Cor. 14:26 – "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done decently and in order."

Col. 3:16 – "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

According to Thayer's Greek lexicon, the main idea of a psalm is musical accompaniment, while a hymn speaks of praise to God, and a song is simply that, whether accompanied or not. The word "spiritual" is added to distinguish our songs from any other types of song.

We even see quite plainly that music plays a large part in heavenly worship.

Rev. 14:2 – "... and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps."

Rev. 15:2-3 – "... them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear

thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”

6. Prayer

We often think of prayer as an individual thing, which it is, but public prayer is also a big part of a NT church’s practice. In fact, the church was birthed in prayer – Ac. 1:14 – “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, ...”

Ac. 4:23-31 is an example of an actual prayer by the church, as a response to the arrest and release of Peter and John.

Ac. 12:12 – Peter was supernaturally freed from prison by an angel, and “he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”

Ac. 21:5 - after staying awhile with disciples at Tyre, “we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.”

Prayer was frequently requested by Paul in his letters.

Rom. 15:30-32 – “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me ...” (also 2 Thess. 3:1-2)

7. Support for evangelization efforts

Here is where there may be a significant difference between the NT church and what we have seen at least for the last 150-200 years. Today, most people see the church as the place to bring unsaved people, in the hopes and expectation that they will respond to a gospel message and an “altar call” from the pastor, and “get saved”. In fact many churches stress this preaching to the lost so much that they neglect their responsibilities to those who are already believers.

The NT shows the church to be made up solely of believers, although acknowledging the possibility of unbelievers being in attendance. We don’t want to needlessly offend or puzzle any unbelievers who come in (1 Cor. 14:23), but church is not for unbelievers. The church is a group of believers whom God has brought together to worship, learn his ways, and function together for the advancement of his kingdom. While “preaching” and evangelizing meetings are certainly valid and we rejoice in all genuine fruit borne from them, yet the regular meetings of the church in the NT are not primarily evangelistic.

Some might object, “If church meetings aren’t meant to get people saved, then how will the church and the kingdom grow?” The answer is not to deny evangelizing, but to recognize that it generally takes place outside the church, and basically in two ways:

1. Through public preaching

- a. In synagogues – this is the initial method of the apostles, who would go to a new city, go to the existing synagogue, and tell the people the gospel. Some would believe and some would not, but the result was the establishment of a local church there consisting of those who had believed.
- b. On the street. An example is Paul on Mars Hill (Ac. 17). Another example is “circuit rider” preachers like John Wesley or George Whitefield. Men like this were excluded from the established churches, and so went out to preach the gospel in the open, to anyone who would listen.
- c. Commonly today, through large public meetings in tents or auditoriums or special “revival” meetings. e.g., Billy Graham, Dwight Moody, Charles Finney, Reinhard Bonnke
- d. Through organizations whose purpose is evangelistic, but who are not really churches themselves – FGBMF, World Missionary Press, CEF, Campus Crusade for Christ, etc.

2. Through private ministry by Christians in the interactions of everyday life.

Ac. 8:26-39 (Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch)

I believe this is one of the most overlooked methods of evangelism, because it is one-on-one, without the excitement of the big-time evangelists' meetings. I also wonder if it is more effective in producing Christians who do not fall away. I really don't know, but if you could interview Christians who have maintained a profession consistently for at least 10 years, it would be interesting to know how many were converted through big-time evangelists, and how many through individual witness.

In any case, the result of evangelization, either public or private, should be that the new believers are immediately incorporated into a local church where they can begin to grow and function spiritually.

What was the evangelical message that the early church was preaching? What were the major points of the gospel that are consistently repeated?

- a. **The Kingdom of God** – not only was this a theme of the OT, but it was the message of John the Baptist, of Jesus, and then of the apostles. Mt. 3:1-2, 4:17; **Ac. 8:12**; 14:22; 20:25
- b. **The Name of Jesus** – Ac. 2:21, 38; 3:16; **4:10-12**; 5:40-42; 8:12; 9:27-29; 10:43
- c. **Christ Crucified** – Ac. 2:23; 4:10; **1 Cor. 1:18, 23**
- d. **Christ Resurrected** – Ac. 4:2; 5:30; **13:15, 30-37**; 17:3; 23:6
- e. **Jesus' Blood, shed for us** – Ac. 20:28; Eph. 1:7; **Col. 1:13-14**; Heb. 9:12; **1 P. 1:18-19**
- f. **Repentance and Believing on the Lord Jesus unto Salvation** – **Ac. 2:38**; 13:38-39; **16:31**; 17:30
- g. **Water Baptism of new believers** – **Ac. 2:41**; 8:16; **10:47-48**; 19:5; 22:16
- h. **Receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit** – **Ac. 2:38-39**; **8:14-17**; 10:45-46; 19:6

Notice that the message was not about the church! How does this compare with the message being presented in churches today? If we don't have the same message, we should not expect the same results.

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