

Welcome back to our ongoing study about the Church. To this point, we have talked about the Master of the Church, the Majesty of the Church, the Mystery of the Church, and the Metaphors of the Church. This week, we will be looking at the Mission...the calling...of the Church. A good place to start our inquiry into the mission of the Church is to go back to Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesian church to help them grasp and understand their identity and calling in Christ...and through that, their calling as His church. It is the book of the Bible that most concerns itself with the nature and operation of the church. He spends the first half of the letter teaching them who they are...and the last half telling them how they are to live on the basis of who they are.

In Eph 1:4 we read, **“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him”** This needs to be our starting place as we contemplate our mission as the church under the headship of Christ. Often when we think of a mission or calling, we immediately jump to what we are to do. Missionary societies might have as their mission statement to “evangelize the world” or to “have a presence in every country by 2025”. Secular non profits might have as their mission statement to “eliminate hunger on the Big Island” or “decrease high school dropout rates by 10% per year”. And, as the church, we are definitely called to do certain things...which we see in a few moments. But we are to start our understanding of our calling... our mission... by understanding that we are first called to “be”. We are called to “be holy and blameless before Him”.

This is a common theme in scripture. In 1 Pet 1:14ff we read, **“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”** Jesus, speaking in Matt 5:48 says, **“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** James 1:4 says, **“And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.** And Paul echoes his words to the Ephesians when he writes to the Colossians, **“And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach”**.

But, what does it mean to be holy? To be perfect? “Perfect” means to be complete...to be mature. “Holy” means to be set apart...to be consecrated for service. It speaks to being clean and righteous in God's sight. It has both a judicial, positional aspect as well as a practical, behavioral component. Part of our mission...our calling...has already been accomplished through the effectual calling of God and the redemptive work of Jesus. When we were redeemed, Jesus became a sacrifice for our sins. We stand before God as judge free from condemnation. We are deemed righteous...holy...perfect...as a result of the cleansing work of the Cross. And as a result of that work, we are a new creation, freed from the bondage of sin and death. We are now free to become practically holy...to have our behavior and practice match our position.

This is why Peter writes, **“be holy yourselves also in all your behavior”**. It is why James writes, **“And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete”**. So, beloved, this is our primary mission as the Church and as members of the church. It is to be holy. This should come as no surprise to us...we have seen clearly in previous studies that we are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ...to be like Jesus. This is foundational to all that we do. As we are transformed into His image, our hearts reflect His heart. Our thinking reflects His thinking. Our actions reflect His actions. Christian mission starts with a Christian mindset.

So, what are those actions to be? What is to be the focus of our behavior? We find the foundational answer to this question just a little later in Ephesians chapter 1. In verse 12, we see that the end result of our calling is to glorify...to worship... our God. We read, **“ to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.”** Again, this is a truth often expressed in His Word. In Ps 22:23 we read, **“You who fear**

the LORD, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.” Ps 86:12 says, “ I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,And will glorify Your name forever.” These are but a few of the verses that enjoin us to glorify our Lord.

We glorify God by coming before Him with thankful hearts in prayer. We give Him glory by extolling his power, goodness, and grace in teaching and in song. We glorify Him by acknowledging, with humble hearts, that His ways are above our ways and yielding to His Spirit and His Word. Yet there are many other means through which we are called to bring glory to God.

We glorify God through maintaining our unity with fellow believers as we strive together to manifest the mind of Christ. Rom 15:5 says, “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we live harmoniously with one another, seeking the things of God together with humility of mind, we bring glory to His name.

We glorify God in our endurance under trial. In 1 Pet 1:6ff we read, “ now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” This is a wonderful passage as it speaks of endurance...of proven faith...as bringing glory and honor to the one enduring under trial as well as the One who is his Sustainer and the source of his endurance. It is an occasion of great joy under heaven. There is rejoicing and praise for a faith proven and refined. There is rejoicing and praise for a beloved brother preserved. And there is rejoicing and praise for the steadfast work of our Lord in upholding and sustaining His child through it all.

Another way in which we honor...or dishonor...God is in our sexual behavior. 1 Cor 6:18ff makes this clear when it says, “Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” We live in a society where sexual morality and fidelity is under constant attack. The idea of chastity before marriage and fidelity after is seen as unrealistic and practically unobtainable. Sadly, these same attitudes have, to a great extent, infiltrated the church. But God's standard has not changed, and we honor God when we conform to His Word and dishonor Him when we do not. This leads us to the next way we bring glory to God...through the witness and testimony of our lives.

1 Pet 2:11ff speaks to this truth, ”Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation”. Mat 5:16 says much the same thing. “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”. Not only do we personally give glory to God through our good deeds and and obedience, they become the catalyst for those watching us to glorify God as righteous and trustworthy. We are told that we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth...of inestimable value to the fallen world around us. But we are also told that that light can be hidden and dimmed... that the salt can become tasteless and valueless...if we lose our distinctiveness and become like the world around us. One magnifies God glory...the other diminishes it.

Not only do we glorify God through the testimony of our behavior, we glorify Him through our verbal testimony...our ready and respectful presentation of the good news of His redemptive work on the cross and His conquest of sin and death through His resurrection. Listen to the words of 1 Pet 3:15ff where Peter writes, “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks

you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame". Our testimony...our defense...is to be done out of a heart that honors and glorifies Christ. It is to be thoughtful and presented with gentleness and respect. And, as we saw earlier, it is to be done with good conscience...out of a life that is consistent with our words.

The importance of a good testimony in both word and deed can not be overstated. Not only does it bring glory to God, but it is the fulfillment of Jesus' last words to His disciples. As we have said before in prior studies, the disciples were in a state of confusion and depression as Jesus was approaching the time of His death at the hands of the religious and governmental authorities. They were expecting a ruling king, not a dead martyr. After the resurrection, Jesus had told them to go to Galilee and wait, but they failed to understand what they were waiting for. They continued to have some expectation that He would still set up His kingdom. In Acts 1:6 they ask Jesus, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" But listen to Jesus response. "He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." His words are almost identical to those recorded by Matthew in Matt 28:18. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

With these instructions, the disciples finally begin to understand what they have been waiting for. Can you imagine what it was like for them in that moment of understanding? They have left occupation and family and home to follow Jesus. They could not comprehend life apart from Christ...apart from His kingdom. Yet he told them that He must leave, and that where He was going they could not come. Now, He gives them a purpose...a life's work. They are to be His witnesses. And beloved...so are we. Here we have a description of much of our lives work as well. He has given us the privilege of participation in the building of His kingdom here on earth...not yet a physical rule, but a spiritual one.

We will look at just a couple more ways in which we are called to glorify God before we bring this study to a close. The first is that we glorify God in our ministry and service. In 1 Pet 4:8 we read, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ"

Finally, we bring glory to God when we love one another. We saw this stated in 1 Pet 4:8 just a moment ago, and we see it in 1 Cor 10:23ff as well. All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor... Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." The context of this passage is not that everything we do has to have a spiritual dimension...that we have to figure out how to brush our teeth to the glory of God or change a tire to the glory of God...that misses the point. God is saying that in all that we do, we have the welfare of our brother...our neighbor...in mind and act in love. It should come as no surprise to us that acting in love with wisdom brings glory to God.

So, beloved, we see in our study of the mission of the Church, that our mission is relatively simple. First, it is to allow God to conform us into the image of His Son...to make us holy and blameless before Him. And second, to

seek to give Him glory in all the ways described in His Word. In doing so, it under girds and empowers our witness, our service, our prayer, our praise, our relationships, our testimony, our steadfastness, our walk...pretty much every aspect of our Christian life. In the same manner that love is to be foundational to all that we do, so, too, is giving God glory foundational to all that we do. May our hearts and lives reflect both. Let us pray.