

Why Does the Church Exist?

Together in Truth

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Thursday, April 30, 2020

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, here we are again in the middle of this series that we've titled "Together in Truth." It's gone by really quickly from my perspective to be able to survey the broad scope of theology in a systematic way and yet in a survey fashion has really been a blessing to my heart and I trust that it has been to you also. I know it's a lot of material to take in but this gives us an opportunity to condense it into a short period of time and we're just so grateful to the Lord for that.

There's been a natural progression, a logical progression in what we've done. We started with the authority of Scripture and that moved us into the character of God, his Triune nature, the Triune nature of our salvation; we took a look at our spiritual enemy, Satan: moved into the nature of man, the nature of sin, and the nature of salvation, God saving individuals by faith in Jesus Christ, hopefully many of you; and then we saw that he saves us not just individually but when he saves us he brings us into the body of Christ which is called the church and we looked at that last time. We saw that the church belongs to Christ, that the church is subject to Scripture under the leadership of scripturally qualified men, saw some other things related the nature of the church, and the question now for tonight is why did God do that? Why this body called the church? Why does the church exist? And that is a most fundamental question for a local church to ask, to answer and to understand, and then to live out in its life over the course of time. We do what we do, we exist for reasons that far transcend our individual salvation, our individual preferences and our individual purposes in a church are all subordinated to the greater question of why does the church exist? Why did God bring the body of Christ into existence and we find that there are vertical and horizontal reasons that give us the answer to that question.

And in that text that I read earlier from Acts 20, there's just a very poignant statement from the Apostle Paul when he refers to the church of God which he, referring to Jesus Christ, which he purchased with his own blood, and that statement staggers me in some ways, it sobers me, it makes me stop and does away with superficiality when I think about ministry, when I think about the church, our congregation locally and then the broader church of Christ, you and I need to contemplate the fact that there was an eternal transaction, there was an eternal event that took place at the cross and Jesus Christ purchased a people out of sin, away from Satan, purchased people with his own blood and that means that the church of God is something of a high and lofty and noble

character. It is not overstating the fact to say that the church is really the primary focus of God's work in the outworking of history; that God is at work in this and the church is more important than the United States of America, talking about the Church universal here, the church of Jesus Christ is more important than nations, it's more important than individual lives, it's more important than anything that would happen in the window of time of our lives. God is working out an eternal purpose amongst his people and those people are precious in the sight of Christ as shown by the price that he paid for them, and the fact that Christ purchased us with his blood means that we need to think about the church, we need to think about our involvement in the church and what we bring to the church and what the church brings to us, we need to realize that it's all transcendent above you and me, above any individual; that the purposes of Christ are at work; that Jesus Christ is working out his will, and it's a privilege for us to be a part of that but we understand that our responsibility is to further the purposes of Christ in a local church rather than simply seeking what we can get out of it. We don't want to simply be those that are receiving things from the church and receiving ministry from the church, we want to understand what the purposes of God are so that we would orient our minds and our intentions in his direction and that the things that God desires from his church would be that which motivates us as well as we gather together and as we serve together in a body of Christ, you know, over the course of time, over the course of years together. Yes, we love to go through life together, we love to share joys and sorrows together and that's one of the great privileges, to share those times in life together with like-minded people who have shown over time that they really love us and they really care about us, that's an aspect of church life, but it would be a mistake for us to think about it in purely social terms like that because there are surpassing goals that God is working out that are to undergird and to inform everything that we do. We do not want to be a church that does what we want it to be in our own humanness, what we want is to understand what God wants his church to be and serve him in the furtherance of his purposes and, beloved, that changes everything about a church life. It elevates the purpose of a local church. It elevates the sense of why we do what we do and we come together to serve our King, our Lord Jesus Christ and our greatest desire is to please him even if it's not necessarily everything that we might want, that there might not be every program that we would want in a local church, but God's brought us together to serve his purposes and that's what we want to understand here this evening, to answer the question why does the church exist.

So we are immediately confronted with that purpose and we are immediately delivered from an attitude of selfishness toward the body and we come to serve rather than to get, and now that God has saved us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, we ask the question what are we to do? What shall we do now that we have been saved like this? And there are three points here this evening that flow naturally together, the first one vertical, the next two horizontal as will be clear in what we do as we go through this, but first of all we could say this: the church exalts God. The church exists to exalt God. To state it differently, Christ formed his church so that we would be an instrument of bringing glory to him and giving our highest and deepest devotion and allegiance to him come what may in life. We exist first and foremost to glorify God, to exalt him not simply in our corporate gatherings two or three or four times a week but in the totality of our lives individually and corporately we are all moving in the same direction under the

influence of the Holy Spirit who brought salvation to us and applied it to our hearts, under the influence of the Holy Spirit our purpose, the reason that we exist is primarily to glorify the God who saved us.

So let's look at a few passages that really bring this out for us. The church exists to honor the source of its life. We exist to glorify the one who saved us. When Christ saved you, my Christian friend, the whole purpose of your existence was redefined for you. Christ sovereignly saved you and brought you to himself and his purpose in doing that was that you would become an instrument of the glory of God; that your life would be lived in a way that ascribes honor to God; that your lips would be used to glorify and honor him and to speak well of him and to tell others about him; and as we're going to see, that your life and your motives and your words are all directed toward the central orienting theme that, "I exist to give glory to God out of great gratitude for what He has done in my life." Thinking in terms of the themes that we have seen in "Together for the Truth," this great Triune God saved me from the grip of Satan and from my bondage to sin. He saved me and delivered me from his own wrath and from the eternal judgment that I deserved and made me someone new, gave me new life, new joy, new hope, new love, brought me into fellowship with other like-minded people like that. And if we have any kind of appreciation for the riches of salvation and what we have been saved from and what we have been saved to, the only thing that we can do if we're thinking properly at all is to say, "This is a matter of overwhelming eternal significance. God has been gracious to me when I deserved the exact opposite from Him," and therefore we are so overwhelmed at the grace of God in our lives, so filled with joy that he's been that good to us that the thing to do is to live life in response and to give glory to him and to devote ourselves to this word of God, the 66 books of the Bible that reveal him and that are such a joy and a delight to our hearts.

So that is the orienting purpose of the church, we exist to exalt our God, the God of our salvation, and Ephesians 1 is a good text to turn to. We've been in this text throughout several of these messages and we go there again. It gives us a sense of how foundational that text is to understanding the reality of our salvation, and so in Ephesians 1, beginning in verses 5 and 6, we see this and Paul could not be more explicit and his repetition here shows us the emphasis that Scripture places on this and shows us the orienting purpose of our salvation. Remember, we looked at this text and saw the Triune nature of our salvation: the Father saves us, the Son saves us, the Spirit saves us. Each member of the Godhead acting to accomplish our salvation, we looked at that. We won't review it here. Today we want to see why they did that, we want to highlight why they did that.

Ephesians 1:5. I say "they," the three persons of the Trinity. I should say, I suppose, why he did that, God, the Triune God, why he did that, but you get my point. Ephesians 1:5,

5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

To the praise of the glory of his grace. God appointed us for salvation so that we would be to the praise of the glory of his grace. With all of our heart, soul, strength and mind individually and corporately, our purpose is to bring praise to the glory of the God of grace.

Now he repeats that theme in verse 12 saying that "to the end," Ephesians 1:12, look at it with me,

12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

That we would ascribe honor to God; that we would thank him; that we would exalt him; that we would magnify his name; that we would sing his praises, all reflecting the glory that he deserves that we would be a people that recognize his glory, that appreciate it, that worship him for that and proclaim it with our lives. Father, Son and then with the Holy Spirit in verse 14, the Holy Spirit of promise, verse 14,

14 ... given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

And so we see this Triune nature of the glory that is to be given to God, we study the works of God in our salvation and we see that the Father elected us before the beginning of time; we see that the Son accomplished our redemption on the cross 2,000 years ago; we see the work of the Holy Spirit in applying that redemption to our hearts and keeping us until we reach heavenly glory; and we look at Father, Son and Holy Spirit and we see what they have done for us and we magnify them what each person of the Trinity has done, and as we study these things and understand them and the surpassing excellence and magnificence of what they are, we praise him, we exalt him, we honor his great and holy name in sincere heartfelt worship. We are not content to go through the motions. This is not an aspect of our lives among many others, this is the central feature of why we exist, we exist to exalt God. You exist as an individual Christian for that very purpose and when we gather together as a body of believers in Jesus Christ, as we gather together as a local church we carry that same purpose and multiply it exponentially as we come together with a joint purpose to do just that and it becomes the orienting feature that unifies us, this belief in Scripture, the authority of God's word, a respect and a fear for God, a desire to obey him and all of this manifesting itself in this surpassing motivation that we would want to glorify the God of our salvation. We don't do that begrudgingly. This is the highest delight and the highest privilege of our lives that we would be able to spend our lives in praise of the great God who saved us. So we see that in Ephesians 1.

Now this is far from the only place where you see it and I want to illustrate this in a few different aspects as we go along, but turn to John 4, the Gospel of John 4, for another perspective on this. The Gospel of John 4. Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well and he says in verse 23, he says,

23 "... an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

So we see here from the words of Jesus, and let me just back up for a moment, as I often refer to in Luke 19:10, Jesus said that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. The Father sent him to accomplish that mission and he did, and here we see from the perspective of God the Father why did God seek us out? Well, it was more than simply that we would be saved from judgment, although that was certainly crucial to the purpose and in love he sought what was best for us and did in our interest that which we could not do on our own, but notice that there is a transcending purpose, there is a vertical dimension to it; salvation is not just about you, in fact, it's not even primarily about you even though it benefits you in infinitely wonderful ways. God saved you, God sought you so that you would be a worshiper of him; that you would be one that recognizes his worth and gladly responds to him in praise and obedience and the proclamation of him to everyone that would listen to you.

So we see that God sought us out in salvation, we saw it in Ephesians 1 three times, we see it here in John 4, that God sought us and made us a people that would be a worshipping community of his. It is not our primary function to consider what the world thinks about us. It is not our function at all to please the world with what we do, or to say the things that the world wants us to say. Boy, would I love 30 minutes with a press corps audience and be able to tell them a thing or two about the church of Jesus Christ because they're always trying to tell the church what the church ought to do and say and be. They have no prerogative, they are speaking far beyond anything that they have any right to say; that is not their place to tell the church what to do. We responded vertically to the God who saved us, we respond to the word of God where he has revealed to us his purposes for us and that is the only thing that we care about. It is a matter of great indifference what the world thinks about us as long as we are being faithful to this primary purpose that we exist to exalt God. We must get that through our minds or we are wasting our time together. We exist to worship God.

Now I want to look at a few more passages here in just a moment but I do want to say this while it's on my mind, is that it's common for people to think about the worship aspect of a service to be the singing, you know, and we sing hymns together, in other places they do other things and, you know, and the music is called the worship time and then you move out of the worship time into the teaching time as though those two things were distinct. That's a false dichotomy and a very bad one to let settle into your mind so let me just address it briefly. You know, preaching God's word is an act of worship. As we preach the word of God from the pulpit, as you hear and receive in a teachable spirit the teaching of God's word, together we are participating in a high act of worship, the highest act of worship because God speaks to his people through his word and we respond to it. He sanctifies us in the truth. We learn more about Christ. The word exposes our remaining sin and it convicts the lost and calls them to Christ, and all of these wonderful things are an act of worship. So we need to have a broad comprehensive view

of what worship is. Yes, music is a part of it but that is not to the exclusion of the proclamation of the word of God as being central to the church's act of worship. So the church exists to exalt God, one of the primary ways that we do that is that we come to his word, we proclaim it, we receive it, we submit to it, we honor it, all of those attitudes of submission and reverence and obedience to God's word, this is all a part of how we exalt God.

So what does it mean to glorify God? Let me just kind of define that a little bit here. What does it mean to glorify God? Well, we honor his character. We remind each other of his attributes and we speak well of him and we speak in reverential tones about who he is and we study him and we study his works, and as we come to understand them, as we remember things that we've known in the past, we honor him and we say, "God, You are great. You are worthy of praise. You are glorious. You are excellent. You are the highest. You are the Lord God Almighty. You are King of the universe. You are King of kings, Lord of lords. You are the Master of all." And we ascribe to him the glory that is due his name. We honor his character. We thank him for his work in our lives. As we see what he has done in our salvation, we return thanks and gratitude toward him. We praise him, we confess sins and we glorify God by confessing our sins to him and humbling ourselves before him, acknowledging that we have strayed from the path, and trusting him for the forgiveness that he's promised us in Christ. All of this is a matter of giving glory to God. Along with that, we speak well of him to each other, we obey his word. All of these things, this spoken praise, this confession of sin, this expression of gratitude, the obedience and praying to him, and expressing our dependence upon him, all a multifaceted diamond reflecting different aspects of the ways that we glorify God in our response to him.

This is all tied together in how we worship God individually and corporately, how we do that together and so there's that aspect of it, and what I want to emphasize right now and kind of crossing a bridge into something that helps us understand how much of this priority it is to us, is that glorifying God is more important in life than any human relationship that we could ever have. Jesus Christ made this very clear to us and we need to have a clarity of mind about the preeminent place that Christ has in our hearts, and that he has a place of exclusive devotion, there is a throne room in the center of our being that is reserved for him and him alone and no one else can enter in there once we have truly come to Christ. Jesus made this claim very plain in the Gospel of Matthew 10:37. I would invite you to turn there with me as we see this most important passage. Matthew 10:37 through 39. Glorifying God is our supreme priority in all of our life relationships. Verse 37, Jesus said,

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

And this is a staggering claim, this is a staggering assertion for Jesus Christ to make, to confront every man, woman and child that has ever lived and ever will live with the claim that he owns the preeminent place of affection in our hearts and if we do not give that to him, we are not worthy of him. In other words, if he's not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. As we process these things, we realize that Christ is more important to us than the closest of family relationships, the closest of marital relationships, of anything that you could think, of any life relationship Christ is preeminent over all of that and the true Christian understands that, and embraces it, and gives him that preeminent place of love.

Now that does not mean that we love our spouse or our children or our siblings any less by loving Christ more, it simply puts them in the proper place of perspective, and some of us know what it's like to have a family member threaten our relationship if we continue in our devotion to Christ, people will come to you and, you know, and say, "Well, you can't be my friend if you're going to continue to talk about Christ or love Him like you're talking about. You know, you've got to choose between me and Christ." Well, that's no choice at all. You see, that choice has already been made. Christ already owns that and you have no right, no one has a prerogative to come to you and try to assert preeminence over your affections for Christ and give them the place that Christ alone deserves. No, beloved, when that happens and sometimes it happens, it's happened to me a few times, you know, you let them walk away and you make it plain that there is nothing that will compromise your devotion to Christ; and it's not that we want them to choose that, we would have everyone be close to us if only they would, but if to them it has to be them or Christ, for us the answer is not open for discussion and Christ is our preeminent priority in life and we love him enough to let human relationships go if they must because we will never walk away from Christ if we're true Christians. And you see, that's part of the church existing to exalt God, is that he owns that place of preeminent affection in our hearts and we do not want to give that to anyone else.

You know, the singer Keith Green had a song, I'll probably mix up the lyrics here in what I'm about to say but he nailed this in the song. He's talking about his wife and he said, "As I told her when we wed, I'd rather be found dead than to love her more than the one who saved my soul." And that is an expression of the reality of this, that our closest human relationship and the best of human relationships is still subordinate to that one place of glory that we give to the Lord Jesus Christ and that's what Jesus is calling for in that passage there in Matthew 10.

So glorifying God is the reason we exist, it's our supreme priority in life relationships, it's the supreme priority in all of the details of life, it's the motivating factor for all that we do. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says,

31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Do you see how these comprehensive statements of Scripture are defining the purpose for which you exist as a believer in Jesus Christ? Everything that you do, done to the glory of God. Every human relationship, subordinate to the glory of God. Thinking about the

nature of our Triune salvation, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory. This is pervasive throughout Scripture and even in the matter of prayer, and I know that these are things that we learn over time as we wrestle with the matters of prayer but, beloved, what Christ taught us is that even in prayer the glory of God is our preeminent priority. It's not first about our physical needs. It's not first about the physical needs of others. Oh, I know that if you randomly took any prayer list in any evangelical church anywhere in America, I say without much fear of contradiction that the focus of that is going to be on the physical needs of the congregation, and to an extent that's okay, we share burdens with one another, but what you and I should have a deeper understanding of the purpose of prayer and not think that a prayer list like that is defining the purpose of prayer in any satisfactory way at all. Jesus said that the glory of God is our supreme priority even in prayer so that in Luke 11:2, you can see it in Matthew 6 as well, Jesus taught us as he is teaching us to pray, the first principle that he teaches us to focus on is, "Father, hallowed be Your name." "God, I express honor to Your name. All that You are and all of Your character, Lord, I direct my response to You, I submit to You and I praise You as my Creator, my Redeemer, and my King. You are worthy of my praise. You are worthy of my devotion. You are worthy of my love and I gladly give it to You as I approach the throne of God again here today."

So we see how pervasive this is in Scripture, the glory of God in prayer, the glory of God in the details of life, the glory of God in human relationships, the glory of God in the Triune nature of our salvation. You see, God saved you to make you a worshiper of him and that, my friends, is the highest possible purpose that you could ever have to exist. Whether men recognize you or not, whether you achieve your earthly dreams or not, whether life is filled with disappointments or not, all of that is secondary to a recognition of the greatness of God and responding to him with thanksgiving and praise and honor as the ever-growing purpose of your heart. That is why you have been saved. That is why the church exists.

A couple of other texts. I could keep going on and on. In Romans 11:36 it says,

36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

All things, and then Paul goes on to say

To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

And in Philippians 4:20, Paul closes his letter saying,

20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

And so this is inescapable. This is gloriously unavoidable. God saved us that we might glorify him. That is why the church exists. That is our first and foremost purpose is to exalt the God of our salvation and it's our privilege to do that individually and together as a local body.

Well, I would be remiss if I didn't stop here and simply ask you if you know something of that reality in your heart? Is the glory of God preeminent in your affections? Is it an organizing principle in your life? You know, you don't have to go into ministry to glorify God. That's not the point of it at all. The purpose is whether you love him above all other things or not. And some of you young people especially need to hear this as you're sorting out what your purpose in life is and all of that, and you're thinking about what your career might be or who you might marry and what you want to pursue in life. Well, time out, time out on all of those considerations. Have you first considered the fact that Jesus Christ has preeminent claim on your life? Have you repented of your sin and humbled yourself and received him as your own Lord and Savior? If you have, something of what I've said should be resonating in your heart and you should find a responsive aspect to your attitude in what I say, but if you can hear this, you know, over the course of time and just dismiss it and it's not important to you, it doesn't shape your motivations, then my young friends in particular, you just need to understand that that's a very bad sign, that whatever else you may say about being a Christian, your lack of interest in the glory of God is exposing the fact that you have not been born again at all. And so I ask you to consider these things, I pray that the Spirit of God would work in your heart to show you the preeminent purpose of God in saving people and that your coldness to these things would be something that would cause you to recognize that you've never been saved in the first instance, and that that conviction of sin would cause you to cry out to Jesus Christ for salvation and have a perspective on it of, "O Lord, Lord, I've called Your name but I've been so casual and so flippant and this hasn't been really supremely important to me. I take it and leave it as I wish. I'm being exposed as a hypocrite here before You." And friend, I can promise you based on the authority of God's word here that if you come to Christ confessing sin like that, he will gladly receive you and shape you and make you into that worshiper that he calls his true people to be. So I invite you to Christ even at this point where we're talking about the glory of God and the purpose for which the church exists. The church exists to exalt God.

Before I move into my second point, I just see this quote from Charles Spurgeon that I don't want to neglect. Charles Spurgeon said this speaking about glorifying God, he says, "He has done such great things for us and He has shown so much goodwill toward us that to pay Him reverence seems not so much the call of duty as the natural impulse of love." You see, we talk about these things not from a sense of irksome duty that, "Oh, I've got to glorify God now." That's the furthest thing from the spirit of what we're saying at all. The person that God has saved recognizes something of these majesties and loves him for it and therefore finds delight in bringing glory to him. It is our duty but it is a duty of delight that is consistent with the highest aspirations of our heart. So you take that as an individual and you elevate it to a corporate level and you see the reason why the church exists, we exist to honor the God, the Christ, the Spirit of our great salvation.

Point 2 here this evening: the church edifies the saints. The church edifies the saints. The church is the realm in which Christians are supposed to grow spiritually. It is a fundamental mistake for churches to orient their services toward the lost because the purpose of the church includes glorifying God and the purpose of the church is to edify the saints and to build them up so that they would grow spiritually. The tagline for our

church, for Truth Community Church is teaching God's people God's word, and the reason that we use that as our tagline is a reflection of this purpose of the church, is that the church exists to edify the saints.

Turn back to the book of Ephesians and we'll go to chapter 2 just now. Ephesians 2 beginning in verse 19. Ephesians 2:19 through 22 where the Apostle Paul after his great exposition of the unity of the church, Jews and Gentiles becoming one body in Christ, he says this in verse 19,

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together [here it is], is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

That is a metaphorical description of the spiritual maturity that is to be taking place in the church, that Christians are growing in their understanding of doctrine, that Christians are growing in their obedience, that they are growing in their desire for Christ and in their ability to serve together and in their love and honor and esteem for God. We grow in this. Becoming a Christian doesn't make you a perfect worshiper, we are built up over time in the course of being together in the ministry of a local church, God is working out a purpose to cause us to grow in maturity, to grow in stability, and to grow in the ever surpassing conviction and desire to honor the God of our salvation. We are to grow up in him and that's one of the purposes of the church. As we exalt God, we edify the saints.

Again if you go over to Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 11 and I'm going to read a little bit of an extended passage here so that we get the full context, but look at Ephesians 4:11.

11 ... He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, [why did he do that?] 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

God gives men to the church so that there would be this process of growth, this developing maturity among all of the saints, that they would be more effective in their service for Christ, that they would be stable in doctrine, and that they would grow to a maturity that is worthy of the glory of the Christ who saved them. This is why the church exists. It is an auxiliary purpose, an auxiliary reason why we exist. God appointed the church to be the realm in which his people would grow spiritually and you see that as you continue on in verse 14. Paul says,

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men,

by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 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 of itself in love.

So the church exists to edify the saints. It is to be the place and the realm in which we grow spiritually. We both receive ministry to that end, and each individual member of the church has a part to play in building up of others. You can see that in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4, you just see that God gifts every individual member of the church and does that so that each one would play a part in contributing to the growth of the greater whole. That's another reason why consistent commitment and participation in the local church is so important. You need it for yourself and the church needs your contribution as well. We need each other and God has given each of us to the church so that we would participate in contributing to the greater common good of those that God has saved and brought together in the context of a local body.

So this is one of the reasons why the church exists, we exist for the edification of the saints, for the building up, for producing spiritual maturity in Christians and, you see, that's a significant purpose and that defines what we do and it gives priority to what we do. We're not here simply to entertain each other. You know, we're not here to entertain the sheep and we're certainly not here to entertain the goats. We are here for joyful and yet serious purposes of producing spiritual growth and maturity amongst the congregation, amongst those who come together in the name of Christ in any local place, and what's true of the local church is the purpose of the universal Church as well. God is at work building a people for himself and as we grow in maturity, as we grow in our understanding of doctrine, and as we grow in our obedience, we will become more stable Christians and more stable Christians, do you know what they're able to do? They are better able to exalt the God who saved them in the first place and who by his Holy Spirit produces this spiritual growth in their individual lives.

So the church exists to exalt God, the church exists to edify the saints, and there's something important to realize as we talk about growth and James Montgomery Boice, one of my favorite writers, a man whose books I recommend all of them to you, James Montgomery Boice makes this crucial point and he says this, "Growth is a process. Growth takes time. The church does not become mature overnight anymore than we as individuals become mature overnight." Those of you that our parents, you know, you have a little infant in your arms, well, you know, you get to be at my point, you look back on that over the course of however many years it's been, you look back from that point and over the course of years you see what maturity is like in your children, and they did not become mature adults in a day, in a month, in a year, or even in 10 years. 10 years into it they're still small children and immature and it's not until they approach those later teen, early 20 years where they start to reflect something of maturity and making adult decisions and moving out on their own. You know, people mature at different ages, some at 16-17, some it's later and that's okay, my point is this, is that bringing a human being to maturity is a process that takes decades.

Well, in like manner a church does not become mature overnight, a church like Grace Community Church that we have the highest regard for, they've been at what they've been doing for 60-some years, 60-70 years whatever it may be. Well, a church like that has much more opportunity to develop and to become what God would have them to be and so you expect different things from a church of that maturity that's been under the teaching of the word of God for decades and decades and decades. They're going to show one level of maturity that a church that hasn't been around as long, doesn't have as skilled a pastor as that blessed church has in John MacArthur, a church that hasn't been around as long is not going to show all of the same features. It's going to have different struggles in its existence and what we need to understand and what's just so important for those of you that are maybe new to our church and you started coming recently before, you know, before we were separated by this national disruption, is to have a proper perspective that informs your expectations. We've been around for eight years, give or take, something like that, what a church that's eight years old is going to be different than what a church that's 60 can do and is going to reflect a different level of maturity in its body than what another church would be. The outreach and the ministries that it's able to support, it's going to be different because you grow into that. No one would look at a 10-year-old and be critical that they can't drive a car or, you know, they're not able to do heart surgery. You say, "Well, of course not. They haven't had the training, the opportunity. They haven't grown into that yet." But that doesn't mean that they're a bad 10-year-old, it just means that they need time and opportunity to grow.

So understanding that growth is a process helps us to have reasonable expectations of any church that we would go to and understand. There are very faithful churches, one just 10 minutes up the road from here, a church of a few dozen people that gather together under a faithful pastor. Well, do you know what? The maturity that they're developing is going to look different from another church that's had more time and has a larger congregation to grow upon. It doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with them, they're doing exactly what God has given them to do and praise God for that. My point here is not to compare one church to another, my point is for us to have an understanding that the maturing of a church takes place over time and it takes place as people like you and me contribute our parts together faithfully over time, and as we do that God silently, invisibly, incrementally causes us to grow so that 10 years from now we'll look back and say, "Wow, we've changed and grown so much from where we were before." Just like when a child goes through their high school or college graduation, you reflect back and look back and say, "Look at how far they have come," and we didn't even see it happening on a day by day basis but the maturity was taking place as the natural forces of life took place in them.

So it is in the church of Jesus Christ. As we faithfully minister in ordinary common ways, as we come together like we do, God is producing a long-term maturity that he will certainly perfect as Philippians 1:6 says, and it's my perspective on Truth Community Church for sure,

6 ... that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

He will bring it to maturity. That's the purpose for which God has appointed the church and there is a greater power at work than what our human ability does, the Holy Spirit himself is producing this maturity in his people as we minister to each other in accordance with the principles of his word.

So the church exists to exalt God, the church exists to edify the saints, and so we meet together to help each other pursue those lofty goals. We all have a purpose to come together in and in Hebrews 10, you can turn there if you can keep up with me, Hebrews 10:23 through 25 show that this is to inform our perspective on why we gather together. Hebrews 10:23,

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

We come together with the sense that perhaps there is someone that I'm going to be able to encourage today, someone that I can help along the way and stimulate them to maturity in their lives and they can stimulate me to that in my life. So there is this outward focus about the church. We understand that the church is not simply for my private edification, it is for the edification of all of the saints and you and I have a part to play in that, and if this time of separation gives us a pause that lets that sink deeper into our hearts, we will come back on the other side of the separation in a better position than we would have been if we had not had it, if this gives us the pause that we need to reflect on this and to secure a greater commitment in our hearts to the purposes of God as he works them out in the context of a local church.

So vertically we exalt God, horizontally the church exists to edify the saints. Thirdly and finally for tonight, the church evangelizes the lost. The church evangelizes lost. We exist not only for the sake of the edification of believers and not only for the exaltation of God, we exist to testify to the world about the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. We exist to tell others about Christ. This is not our private possession. We have a responsibility to go beyond our walls as we go out into the world to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ with us and evangelize others and Scripture is explicitly clear about this.

Turn to the Gospel of Luke 24, the Gospel of Luke 24 where Jesus Christ speaks to this explicitly. He says in Luke 24:47, he says,

47 ... repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon

you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

The disciples in that day were to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit before they would begin their mission of proclamation, but Christ said, "Your mission, I am commissioning you, I am sending you to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations starting from Jerusalem." Then just before his ascension in the book of Acts 1:8, he said this, he said,

8 ... 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.

And the book of Acts is the testimony of the acts of the apostles as they obeyed that commission, first under the primary leadership of Peter and then the latter part of Acts emphasizing the ministry of the Apostle Paul. But we see the church going out sometimes under the impulse of persecution, going out and testifying and God honoring that witness to the salvation of souls and bringing more people in to be worshipers of him, adding to the numbers of those exalting God and contributing to the edification of the saints.

Now if you're like me, evangelism doesn't come naturally to you. There's some of us that are like that. I'm very grateful to have men in our church who are natural evangelists and I'm so grateful that God has given us men like that. Some of us, it's not quite as easy for us to do that. We find that to be a little bit more difficult. Well, the theologian Bruce Milne has some helpful balance for us as we consider these things. He said and I quote, he said, "We discharge a basic part of our personal responsibility as Christ's witnesses in the world by throwing our effort, prayers and gifts behind the evangelistic program of our local church. This may be especially relevant to those who find personal witness particularly difficult." In other words, we are gifted differently, we have different opportunities that are given to us and those that are on the front line of evangelism, we still participate and support in their work with our prayers, with our financial support, with our encouragement to them as they go out, for some as we teach and give instructions there's this corporate testimony, there's this corporate evangelism in addition to the individual efforts that we make with our loved ones and with our circle of influence but we understand that as a church, as a church evangelism is a part of what we are to be doing.

So we see the purpose of the church in the exaltation of God, the edification of the saints, and the evangelism of the lost. So what we find as we wrap this up for this evening is this, I say this gently, I say this by way of constructive encouragement and to lay down thoughts that should be the foundation of any local church worth its salt, we must understand this, beloved, that the purpose of the church is higher than what you can personally get out of it. There's more to the church than coming through the doors and saying, "What's here for me? What programs satisfy my needs? What programs are here for my family and what we want to do?" There's more to it than that. I don't mind people asking that as one of their questions as they're determining where they want to settle and

worship in a local church. I'm speaking beyond Truth Community Church here to broader principles that should inform every true Christian. We need to understand that we come to the church not simply as consumers to get what we want as though we go to Walmart or Kroger and say, "What's here in this for me that I can get for myself?" No, that consumer mindset is an entirely wrong way to think about our involvement with the local church. We must understand, as we looked at last time, that the church belongs to Jesus Christ and therefore his desires are supreme, not mine. Since it belongs to him, we ask then what does he want from the church? Why does the church exist from his perspective? And from the perspective of Christ whose opinion is the only one that matters, from the perspective of Jesus Christ who bought the church with his own precious blood, the church exists to exalt God, the church exists to edify the saints, the church exist to evangelize the lost, and you see, a true Christian coming to a true church looks at that and embraces that and looks for a church that's committed to those principles as one of the primary criteria by which they would determine their future church association. I'm speaking from as a perspective, someone looking for a church, which I'm not. I've found my church and I intend to be here until I die, but you go into a church and you want to know does this church understand why it exists? Does this church understand the exaltation of God including a primary emphasis on the consistent deep teaching of the word of God from its pulpit? Does this church understand the importance of edifying the saints and building up Christians as a central aspect of its mission, not simply being a place that entices unbelievers to come in and makes them feel comfortable without any call to repentance or salvation whatsoever? Does this church understand that it has a purpose of evangelism which is different from being a seeker sensitive church. You know, we go out to evangelize rather than defining our ministry around the desires of the lost who have no desire to serve Christ at all. Does the church understand that, you ask yourself as you come, and then you ask the question, you know, you have the perspective of, "I want to contribute to the life of this church. I'm not here simply to receive but I'm here to give." And asking that question why does the church exist leads you down that path to the place that God would have you to be.

So there is a vertical aspect as we exalt God together, there is a horizontal aspect in the edification of the saints and the evangelism of the lost. What is the purpose of the church? Why does the church exist? I'll let Charles Spurgeon have the last word tonight. He said, "The church is not formed to be a social club, a political association, or to promote its own opinions. It is a body created of the Lord to accomplish His own ends and purposes, and it exists for nothing else."

Let's pray together.

Father, make Truth Community Church a church like that, a church that exalts You, that edifies the saints, and effectively evangelize the lost. Father, we long, we long to worship You, we long to be effective in praising You, we long to see the growth of believers, we long to see You raising up men for spiritual leadership under our roof, and we long to see You use our people and to use our pulpit for the salvation of souls that are presently outside Your kingdom. God, we ask You to do that through us, not for our sake but for thine, not for our glory but for Yours alone. Father, we commit all of these things to You

and we express to You with imperfect hearts and knowing that we have fallen short at every step along the way, but we express to You, appealing to You who know what's in our hearts, Father, that our desire is these three things to be fulfilled in the ministry of our church. So please, our God, please help us to that end corporately, in our families, in our marriages, and in our individual lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.