

An Approved Church Has Divine Purposes

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Revelation 2 and 3 address the approval rating of seven churches in what is today Turkey. These seven churches might have all thought that they passed muster, but when Jesus reviewed them, only two were actually approved. Of the other five, three were failing, and two had failed.

Churches must be approved by God. A church that is not approved by God is dead, and the members of that church are in great danger. How can we tell if a church is approved by God? When we consider the problems listed in Revelation 2 and 3, we see that much of the issue relates to purpose. In order to be approved by God, a church must be focused on the six purposes of the church found in the New Testament.

The problem is this: many churches form themselves out of their own purposes. Here are some examples of common purposes among churches today that are not purposes given by God: making itself larger (fiscal and numeric); merging a social and spiritual need; solving social problems. While these things may be important for society, they are NOT the purposes given to the church. When a church begins creating its own purpose(s), then it is a dead church.

But the other issue is that sometimes churches simply mis-prioritize the purposes that the church is given. Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira in Revelation 2 are a good example; they worked hard on some of the purposes of God, but had left undone others. A church is not approved if it neglects any of the purposes given to it by God.

A healthy church that is approved by God has these things in place: First, it functions for divine purposes rather than man made ones; second, it focuses attention on ALL purposes, neglecting none of them.

What are the biblical purposes given to the church? There is no clear list, but from passages like Revelation 2 and 3 and other places in Scripture we can put together six categories that could be called the divine purposes of the church.

6. Evangelism

There are no commands in the Scriptures for the church to save the lost, nor are there examples. But since we know that the Apostles' great commission was to save the lost AND indirectly to establish the church, we infer that these directives go hand in hand. Since the church was authorized and obligated to send out workers to evangelize, it is a necessary inference that the church is charged with this work.

5. Worship

There are many passages in Scripture that show examples of the worship of the local church. Acts 20:7 speaks about the first day of the week as being a day that churches gathered together to worship. 1 Corinthians 11 through 14 describes the means and manner of that worship.

4. Edification

An important work of the church (perhaps one which deserves particular emphasis) is the work of edification. Ephesians 4:12-16 describes the church work of equipping saints for the work of ministering to others. The church could be described as the barracks and training ground for Christian soldiers; it is the church which both trains and equips saints for spiritual warfare.

3. Organization

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells Timothy that the purpose of his letter is to describe the operation of the local church. He had just finished describing the appointment of elders and deacons in the local church. In Titus 1 Paul directs Titus to go to Crete to install elders in the churches there. We can conclude that one of the purposes of the church is to organize itself according to the pattern of the Scriptures.

2. Benevolence

Benevolence is the word we use to describe helping someone out. Specifically, the church is charged with making certain that the physical needs of saints are being met. We see mention of this work numerous times in the New Testament; in Acts alone there are multiple examples of collections being taken up and distributed to needy saints. Throughout the New Testament there are directions on the taking up of collections and the distribution for need. Jesus promised in Matthew 6:31-33 that those who seek first the kingdom need not worry about their sustenance; benevolence is the mechanism that helps fulfill this divine promise.

1. Purity

Perhaps the most often mentioned work of the church is the work of purity. This command is found in two parts: the discipline of the church and the purity of the doctrine of the church. Entire books of the New Testament (1 Corinthians, Galatians, 2 John) are dedicated to this theme. Often times the church is compared to a bride being prepared for her husband; purity is the adornment of that bride.

As we have already seen, there is a great danger for a local church that does not have the approval of Jesus. But we have not mentioned that there are great rewards to being approved. For one thing, churches that are approved need not fear the future (Rev. 2:10, 3:8). They have a promise from God that they will be preserved in difficult times. They need not fear growth, since an approved church is one which God causes the growth (1 Cor. 3:7).

As well, an approved church is a place where members can have a great deal of confidence in their hope. They know that they are working out their salvation in a manner that is properly directed. They know that if they stumble, there are others who will lift them up. If they wander, the discipline of the church will restrain their departure.

Those churches who were approved of God had great blessings in Revelation 2-3. Jesus said *"I will write on him the name of My God"* (Rev. 3:12). What better reason to seek approval is there?