



Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

Lesson 7: The God-Glorifying Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says that he will build his church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Why do you think Jesus established a church instead of a bunch of unassociated individuals?

MAIN IDEA

God calls the church to display his glory to the world by reflecting his character. The church is central in God's saving purposes because it is the place where He causes His name to be made known and His glory to be put on display.

DIGGING IN

We can begin to answer the question of why Jesus established a church by going back to the Old Testament and considering why God promised the new covenant.

Ezekiel 36:22–27.

This is the promise of the new covenant, which Jesus said He would fulfill through His death (Luke 22:20; see also Jer. 31:31–34). While this passage specifically refers to Israel and the new covenant promise to them, which will be finally fulfilled when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26), we can see in this passage why God has chosen to act in saving His people.

1. Based upon this passage, how would you summarize God's motivation for acting on behalf of His people, His purpose in saving them? (see also Eph. 3:20–21) _____

2. Does this mean that God doesn't save us because he loves us? And does this mean that God is egotistical? _____

In the rest of this study, we're going to look very briefly at three New Testament passages that all say the same thing from a different angle about why Jesus established the church.

Reason 1: To Display God's Wisdom

In the New Testament, we see that God's purpose to display His glory comes to fruition through the church.

Ephesians 3:10–11.

It is through the church, Paul says, that God is now displaying His abundant wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. He is displaying His glory before all the universe through the people He has reconciled to Himself in Christ!

- 3. What is it about the church that enables it to display the wisdom of God? (Hint: You'll find the answer Paul specifically has in mind back in Eph. 2:11–16 and 3:4–6.) _____

Reason 2: To Display God's Love

In John 13, Jesus washes His disciples' feet as an example of humble service and love and instructs them to follow His example (vv. 14–15).

John 13:34–35.

- 4. What commandment does Jesus give to His disciples in this passage? _____

- 5. According to Jesus, what will happen when His disciples obey this command? _____

- 6. How does our love for one another display God's glory? _____

Reason 3: To Display God's Oneness

John 17:20–23.

- 7. What does Jesus pray for His disciples in this passage? _____

- 8. What result does Jesus see happening when God answers His prayer for His disciples' unity (see vv. 21, 23)? _____

It is in the local church that the love and unity Jesus prays His disciples would have comes to its fullest and most concrete expression. When Christians commit to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to submit to one another, to encourage and instruct one another, and to preserve the unity of faith together—which is what church membership is—they display God's glory in their life together.

9. How does the unity of a local church display God's glory? _____

10. What are common reasons people go to church? According to the passages we've studied today, why should we want to go to church? _____

It's in the local church that the wisdom, love, and oneness of God are most concretely and visibly displayed as people who are very different in the world's eyes worship God together, serve each other, and build each other up in the knowledge of Christ.

That is why the local church is such a crucial aspect of God's plan of salvation: it's where God intends to display His glory to the watching world.¹

¹ Adapted from Bobby Jamieson, *Built upon the Rock: The Church*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 41–44.