

March 2008—*The Purpose of the Church*

There is a great deal of muddled thinking today about the nature and purpose of the church. This is common not only among those outside the church but also among many within it. As a result, many churches—even seemingly “successful” churches—have lost their way and are not fulfilling Christ’s purpose in the world.

With simplicity, brevity, and clarity, C.S. Lewis dispels our confusion:

It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. Just as it is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time. In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.¹

If Lewis is right that “the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs,” we have a problem. The practice in many churches today appears to be to draw people to church and make them donors and volunteers, which is a very different proposition indeed. What is to be done?

One wonders what C.S. Lewis would say. Perhaps something like this: Don’t criticize the church or its leadership; instead, pray for them. Then do two simple things: first, seek out whatever training you need to effectively share the Good News of Jesus with those who don’t yet know him. Second, find believers who want to grow in Christlikeness and simply read the gospels together, discussing how to apply Jesus’ teachings to everyday life. If even a small minority in a church would start doing this, the church would soon discover that it is becoming what it is meant to be: a place where people who have been drawn to Christ are being made into little Christs.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18–20 (ESV)

¹C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, Simon & Schuster Touchstone, 1996), p. 171.