

WHAT IS THE CHURCH FOR? – Andrew Marsay

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. His authority over the church arises from His resurrection which confirmed His Divine status and which also confirmed the status of the church as a people saved from death, sin and hell.
2. The Lord Jesus' authority over the church is exercised by His Word; The Old and the New Testament Scriptures. He exercises His authority through men called and set apart to the task of expounding His Word for the benefit of the church. His church is therefore ordered in a way that gives priority to His Word above all other considerations.
3. The Lord Jesus exercises the role of ruling His church for the honour and glory of His Father. He achieves this honour and glory by extending His Father's rule to people all over the world. Jesus commands and equips His church to 'make disciples of all the nations', drawing them into visible communities linked explicitly to His Name through baptism, and teaching them to obey everything He commanded.
4. Discipleship is something that the Lord Jesus took very seriously while on earth. It is the process whereby the believer who has been called into a relationship with Him, is progressively transformed to become like Him. To Jesus, the process of discipleship is the key to the success of the mission of the church, as the Sermon on the Mount well illustrates.
5. The Lord Jesus Christ has arranged for the church to be ordered in such a way that, if His instructions are followed, true discipling will take place and His people will indeed become the radically transformed community that He sees as the best means of communicating heavenly realities to a world without hope and without God.
6. To bring about this radical life transformation, the Lord Jesus focuses His attention on the renewal of His peoples' thinking. His method is that through the reading and especially the preaching of His Word, His people will progressively develop the mindset that He Himself had, namely that, knowing the enormous privileges of being secure forever in heaven, Christians will not bask in this safety but rather will set aside their own interests in favour of one another's interests and those of His people who are not yet in the fold.
7. Jesus' aim is that this Christlike mindset so takes hold of Christian people that they will become known primarily for their self sacrifice and humility; being content to wait for His return to experience real status and glory.

8. To bring about this extraordinary transformation the Lord Jesus Christ first gave to the church apostles and prophets to establish the church's foundational truths, now written in the Bible. He also gives to the church those willing to become effective custodians and propagators of His Truth.
9. These called and trained men are given three main tasks by Scripture:
 - To prepare Christians to be willing and able to live out a sacrificial Christian life in whatever job or service they find themselves in;
 - To identify and train men who are willing and able to further strengthen and extend the work of teaching His word and 'disciplining' believers;
 - To defend the truth given to the church against all threats, new and renewed, to its vitality and integrity.
10. The work of teaching and disciplining is at the very heart of Jesus' mission in the world. Knowing and prizing His methods of reaching the world is therefore an essential quality for leadership in the church. Historically, those periods which have had the deepest and most enduring impact in terms of the extension of Christ's Kingdom and also the moral transformation of the world have been times when His methods of teaching and disciplining have been most thoroughly applied. The rapid advances of the early church in the book of Acts are testimony to this as is the 16th/17th century Reformation.
11. It is not the role of the church to anticipate the social impacts of faithful ministry great though these may be and certainly not to allow its focus on the ministry of Christ's word to be replaced with a focus on such issues. The church may well give its wholehearted support to those of its members who initiate good works consistent with its Gospel ministry, and indeed prepare believers spiritually to be able to do such things. But these works are not to displace the primary word ministries of the church.
12. It is with an eye to the fullest possible implementation of its permanent mandate to 'disciple the nations' that the church remains faithful to the purpose and the methods ordained by Jesus Christ of declaring, defending and demonstrating the truth of the gospel. These are the methods set out in the Gospels, practiced by the apostles in the book of Acts, and explained and enforced in the New Testament's doctrinal and pastoral epistles.