

Covenant Goals

I recently submitted an article to the local newspaper. The subject of the article was telos—end, goal, aim. I suggested in that article that people have a telos, and life works best when we fulfill the purposes for which God designed us.

Churches also have a telos—a goal, purpose or aim. Every year at this time, we have our annual meeting. This provides a good occasion for us to consider what the church is trying to accomplish. What is the purpose of the church? What are its goals and aims? What is the telos of LBC?

- I. The highest and most general purpose for the church is the glory of God.
 - A. The ultimate goal of all things is the glory/honor of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

Eph 3:21 *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

1 Pet 4:11 *... that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*
 - B. The church does *not* primarily exist for us. Christ is the head of the church, and the church exists for the greater glory of Christ. The church ultimately serves God, not man.
 - C. That means that we don't simply do whatever people want to do in the church. And we don't do whatever seems to work best. We do what God has commanded us to do, and we do it in a way that is most likely to bring glory and honor to God.
 - D. Since our ultimate aim is to bring glory to God, we gauge success in terms of faithfulness to God and his word. Success is not a matter of facilities or numbers of members or budget. We gauge success in terms of faithfulness.
 - E. Our guiding lights are the word of God and the character of God. We dare not do anything in the church contradictory to God's word or character.

- F. Many churches today, unfortunately, format the church to be man-centered. Their primary concern is giving people what they want. People have a consumer mentality, and that means that they see the church as just another social service agency—“I got to the church that provides the best services for me.”
- G. If we believe the aim of the church is the glory of God, then we understand that our highest goal is *not* just to give people what they want, but to give God what he wants. We follow the Scriptures and we do what is in keeping with the character of God no matter what people might think about it.
- H. Our aim is *not* pleasing people; our aim is pleasing God.

Trans: The primary aim of the local church is the glory of God. We strive to do all things in a way that brings honor to him. We should be highly committed to that goal; that’s our first and highest purpose for the church.

II. The strategy for bringing glory to God

We can further describe the purpose of the church by affirming two basic strategies or means of achieving our goals: evangelism and discipleship.

A. Make disciples; evangelism

Matthew 28:19–20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

1. The motto of LBC is “making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ.” That’s our goal—to reach people with the Gospel message and to see them converted to Christ. We want all people to become disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. The word “disciple” in the Bible is synonymous with “believer.” All believers in Jesus are disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is not a higher set of expectations for those who are highly committed. Every believer should consider himself to be a disciple.

Once a person becomes a believer, the goal for the church is to help him become a fully-devoted follower of Christ. That's what discipleship is—the process of following Christ with full devotion/commitment. How do we help disciples mature?

B. Edification “*teaching them to observe...*”

1. Edification means “to build up.” We edify believers through biblical and theological instruction/education/training. We want to produce spiritual maturity in disciples of Christ.
2. We build people up through preaching during the worship service, through SS classes, Bible studies, and other opportunities to hear God's Word.
3. Worship is also a means of edification. When we participate in prayer, singing, giving, and listening, it builds us up as Christians.
4. Service in the church is another means of edification. We grow through serving. We build others up when we serve them, and we build ourselves up spiritually by serving others.

Trans: The two basic means of bringing glory to God in the church are evangelism and edification.

III. The goals of the church covenant

A. Our church has a covenant. The church covenant does two important things:

1. A covenant *makes* the church. Essentially, a church forms when baptized believers in Christ agree together to form a church and to operate it according to biblical principles. A group of Christians is just a group of Christians until the group makes a covenant together to operate the group as a church.
 - a) From God's point of view, the Lord builds his church. It's his work; Jesus said, “I will build my church.” God establishes churches.

- b) But from a human point of view, a legitimate church comes into existence and operates by means of a covenant. The group covenants together to make a church.
 - c) They also usually produce a constitution that gives the details of how the church intends to operate.
 - d) Churches also generally produce a doctrinal statement.
2. A covenant *states* what the church is trying to accomplish.
- a) A covenant is an agreement or a contract. The members of the church agree to operate the church in a certain way. The covenant and constitution describe the way that the church plans to operate.
 - b) The covenant is a statement of intention or purpose. Our church covenant says, “we engage, therefore...” We are attempting to do various things. We may succeed or we may fail, but our intention is to fulfill the biblical expectations for a local church.

In the 2nd paragraph, our covenant says that we pursue our goals “as the Holy Spirit shall enable us...” So this set of goals and intentions is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. We are trusting that God will enable us to achieve these goals.

We may perhaps fail to achieve these goals because of sin. If members of the church are not led by or filled with the Spirit, the church might come short of some of these goals.
 - c) Frankly, no church perfectly or completely fulfills the biblical expectations for a church. Why is that? Because the church is composed of sinners. Whenever a group of sinners comes together to do anything, the results will be far less than perfect.

- d) So the covenant is a statement of intention or aim. We are trying to do these things; we are engaging to do them under the power of the Holy Spirit, but our success will always be incomplete and imperfect. No church has perfect success in achieving all its goals.

Our expectations of the church should be both realistic and biblical.

- e) In a few minutes, we'll read our church covenant, as we do every year. Note a few things about the covenant:

(1) The 1st paragraph identifies who is in the covenant. It states that the church is a group of baptized believers in Christ who are entering into a covenant to function as a church. This group of believers intends to be a local body of Christ and intends to do all things for the glory of God.

(2) The next three paragraphs express what the people of the church are trying to do. And all of these goals and purposes are simply expressions of biblical goals. This is biblical language. We could find chapter and verse for each of these goals.

(3) The 2nd paragraph pertains to *relationships* among the members of the church. We are supposed to love one another, care for and watch over one another, rejoice and sorrow with one another, reconcile with one another, encourage one another, and assemble together regularly.

Because we are all sinners, we must extend grace to others when they fail to meet our expectations. We need to demonstrate love, compassion, and forgiveness to others when they come short of these expectations. And we all do.

Perhaps this is the paragraph that we need to focus on this coming year.

- (4) The 3rd paragraph deals with the *work* of the church itself. We want to see the church grow spiritually. We want to enjoy a spirit of peace and unity. We intend to sustain correct worship, ordinances, and doctrines. We engage to support the work of the church financially.
- (5) And the final paragraph of the covenant expresses certain *lifestyle* choices that should be true of the members of the church. We want to avoid worldliness. We intend to be honest, faithful, and exemplary in our behavior. We intend to maintain private and family devotions and bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We will seek the salvation of our friends and family and pray for one another.

That's the church covenant. It's a statement of our goals and objectives as a church. The covenant states our telos.

Obviously, the church covenant is *not* the final authority for the church; the Bible is always the final authority. But the covenant is a clear and simple summary of what the church is trying to do.

So whenever we are unclear about our purposes and goals as a church, we can refer back to the covenant. As times change and various fads and fashions rise and fall, we can refer to the covenant to see if our ideas fit with the established goals of the church.

And we can evaluate whether we are being faithful by comparing what we are doing to the church covenant. Are we engaging to fulfill the goals stated in the covenant? Are we failing to fulfill these goals? That's how we gauge how well the church is doing.

And if someone is flagrantly violating the terms of the covenant, we know that we have to apply church discipline. You cannot remain a member in good standing with a church when you are habitually and unrepentantly violating the stated goals of the church.

We strongly affirm that the Bible is the final authority for the beliefs and practices of the church. For the purposes of forming a church and stating its goals and objectives, we have established a church covenant. The covenant tells us in clear terms what we are trying to do as a church. We will no doubt fall short of our intentions and goals, but at least we know what our intentions are.

And so as we have our annual meeting, it's important that we remind ourselves about what the covenant says and that we renew our commitment to operating the church according to the biblical goals stated in the church covenant.

And if you are not a member of the church, but you agree with our covenant and doctrinal statement, we invite you to become a member of LBC.