The Nature & Functions Of The Church

QUESTION 1

What is the purpose of the church?

The Scriptures reveal that the church exists primarily for the praise of God's glory and grace (Eph. 1:6,12; 3:21). This is the central purpose of the church.

QUESTION 2

What are the objectives of the church?

Because the church exists for the praise of God's glory and grace, Scripture reveals three primary objectives that need to be at the forefront of any local church.

1. Submission To The Headship of Christ

The ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God through the demonstration that He alone is the sovereign God. During this dispensation God exercises His sovereign rule in the church through the headship of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). It follows that the headship of Christ needs to be one of the primary objectives of the church (Eph. 1:9-10; 5:22-24). God's glory and grace is magnified in the church when it submits to its Head.

2. The Perfecting Of The Saints

One of God's primary objectives in His choosing us before the creation of the world was to make us holy and blameless in his sight (Eph. 1:4) and to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). It follows that one of our primary objectives must be to see people transformed into His likeness (Col. 1:28-29). God's glory and grace is magnified when people are conformed to the image of Christ.

3. Declaring The Gospel To The Lost

Scripture declares that God predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ "in accordance with his pleasure and will for the praise of His glorious grace" (Eph. 1:5-6). Again, we have been chosen and predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will "for the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:11-12). Furthermore, we have been marked in him with a seal to guarantee our inheritance "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14). The salvation of man brings glory to God by demonstrating His marvelous grace and manifold wisdom (Eph. 1:7-8; Rom. 11:33-36). However, it is necessary for men to hear the gospel of salvation before they can believe and then be placed "in Christ" (Eph. 1:13). The church has been commissioned by Christ to make disciples and preach the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8). Thus, one of the churches
primary objectives needs to be declaring the gospel to the lost so that those who have been appointed to eternal life can believe and place their faith in Christ (Rom. 10:14-15).

QUESTION 3

What are the priorities of the church?

The priorities of a local church need to be shaped by the purpose of the church and the objectives of the church as listed above. A church needs to set priorities, goals and establish programs which line up with the purpose and objectives of the church as stated in God's Word. God has established these to carry us toward His ultimate design for the church, but we must know what they are and be consciously committed to fulfilling them. All of our programs and activities need to be moving us toward these objectives. These priorities and objectives need to be evident in our functions and activities.

QUESTION 4

What are the descriptions of the church and what is their significance?

One of its descriptions relates to the progress of revelation and the place of the church in history. The rest of the descriptions can be categorized in relation to Christ, to one another (i.e. other believers in Christ) and to the world (i.e. the unsaved around us and the world system that is headed by Satan, ruled by Satan and controlled by Satan and which leaves God out and is rival to Him).

In Relation To The Progress Of Revelation

A Mystery (Eph. 3:2-13)

In Relation To Christ

The Body Of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27)

The Bride Of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:9)

Disciples (Matt. 28:19-20; John 15:8)

Brothers (Mark 3:31-35)

Sons (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-2)

Friends (John 15:13-15)

A Temple - God's building (1 Cor. 3:10-16; 1 Pet. 2:5)
Holy Priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5)

Branches (John 15:1-8)

Sheep (John 10:27)

Bondservant (Rom. 1:1)

Stewards - one given a trust (1 Cor. 4:2)

**In Relation To One Another (i.e. other believers)**

Members of **Christ’s body** - we are "eyes," "ears," etc. - (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 12:3-4; Eph 4:11-16)  
*Relates to our functions/gifts*

Members of **God’s family** - we are "brothers" and "sisters" in Christ - (James 1:2,9,19; 2:1,5,14 etc.)  
*Relates to our position*

Members of **God’s army** - we are "soldiers" (2 Tim 2:3-4; Eph 6:10ff; 1 Peter 5:8)  
*Relates to our battle*

Members of **God’s workforce** - we are "fellow workers" (Matt 28:19-20; Phil. 2:25)  
*Relates to our mission*

**In Relation To The World**

Ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20)

Aliens/Sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11)

Strangers (1 Pet. 2:11)

Soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

Athletes (2 Tim. 2:5)

Farmers (2 Tim. 2:6)

Salt (Matt. 5:13)

Light (Matt. 5:14-16)

There are probably over 80 descriptions of the church in the New Testament. All of these serve the purpose of helping to describe the nature, character, purpose, objectives and functions of the church. Notice that most of various descriptions of the church imply action and ministry. They
describe the character, conduct, and calling of the church. It seems evident that God has painted these pictures in Scripture in order to challenge, motivate, and charge us into action. It is absolutely imperative that we grasp this vision of who we are as God’s people, where we are, and why we are here—God’s representatives in an alien country. The hope is that we will become gripped by this truth, or we will fail to see and respond to the purpose for our existence. These figures call attention to who and what the people of God are, but there is another purpose as well. God wants us to reflect on what we, His people, ought to be doing. We are to be engaged in building up this spiritual house, offering spiritual sacrifices in the worship of God, proclaiming the excellencies of God to a world lost in darkness, and abstaining from fleshly lusts so that we can keep our behavior and testimony above reproach before an unbelieving world so that we never discredit our witness. As one writer says, "The nature of the church is far too broad to be exhausted in the meaning of the one word ekklesia. . . . This richness of description precludes a narrow concept of the church and warns against magnification of one aspect to the disregard of others."

QUESTION 5

What are the functions of the church?

The functions of the church should be considered under two categories -- the church gathered and the church scattered. These functions have been determined by God and will, when properly applied, enable a local church to fulfill its stated purpose and objectives.

A. The Church Gathered (5 primary functions)

*Instruction (in the Word of God by gifted teachers)*

(1) **Preaching** (Ezra 6:14; Neh. 8:8; 2 Tim. 4:1-3). The Word of God must be faithfully preached from the pulpit: (a) inductively, (b) exegetically, and (c) expositionally.

(2) **Teaching** (Acts 20:20; Col. 1:28-29). The Word of God must also be taught in both large and small group settings. This involves questions and answers, and practical dialogue together around the Word with practical applications that hit people where they live.

(3) **Admonishing** (Rom. 15:14; Col. 1:28-29)

(4) **Correcting** (2 Tim. 4:2)

(5) **Rebuking** (2 Tim. 4:2)

(6) **Encouraging/Exhorting** (2 Tim. 4:2)

(7) **Entrusting** (2 Tim. 2:2-4). Believers must be trained in such practical areas as how to study their Bibles, how to pray, how to witness, how to walk in the power of the Spirit, etc., so that they may, in turn, be able to train others.

(8) **Equipping** (Eph. 4:11-16)
**Worship (in spirit and in truth - John 4:24)**

(1) **Singing and Making Melody** (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). As with all other aspects of worship, music must be the product of spirit-motivated expression to God and should be designed to encourage and unite hearts together in adoration of Him.

(2) **Giving Praise and Thanksgiving** (Heb. 13:15; Col. 1:12; 3:15-17). Believers need to be taught and challenged to live by praise and thanksgiving as they share together in the riches of Christ. To encourage this, the church needs some public opportunity to express its adoration to God, both individually and corporately. Planned times of testimony can be planned to provide opportunity for pracorporate praise and thanksgiving.

**Fellowship - (i.e. Koinonia OR fulfilling "one another" body life commands)**

Our responsibilities to one another include loving one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35; John 15:12; Eph 5:1-21 Peter 1:22-23; Rom 12:10; 1 John 4:7), encouraging one another (Heb 3:13; 10:24-25; 1 Thes 5:11; 1 Cor 8:1; Eph 4:16; 4:29), admonishing one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16), bearing with one another (Eph 4:1-3), forgiving one another (Eph. 4: 32; Col 3:13), serving one another (Gal 5:13; John 13:12-15), submitting to one another (Eph 5:21; Phil 2:6-8), being of the same mind toward one another (Rom 15:5-6; John 17:11, 20-23; Acts 2:46-47; 4:32; Psalm 133:1; Rom 16:17-18; 1 Cor 11:18; Eph 4:23; Phil 2:2; Acts 6:1-7), accepting one another (Rom. 15:7), honoring one another (Rom 12:10), and restoring one another (Gal 6:1-3; Matt 18:15-17).

**Prayer**

(1) **Adoration** (Eph. 3:20-21). Believers need to be challenged to make every aspect of their lives an act of worship to God by which they count and act on the glories of God’s person and grace. Unless this is true, the Sunday worship service becomes nothing but lip service, an exercise of self-worship by which people seek to satisfy selfish ends while they manage to keep their hearts from God (Isa. 29:13).

(2) **Confession** (1 Cor. 11:28; 1 John 1:9; Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:13). Believers should be encouraged to keep short accounts with God in order to keep a conscience void of offense and stay in fellowship for the purpose of God’s glory, effective prayer, meaningful worship, biblical understanding and growth, and effective ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(3) **Thanksgiving** (Col. 3:17; Eph. 1:16; 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 1 Tim. 2:1). One of the most definitive characteristics of a Christian should be the overflow of thanksgiving that comes from someone who has a true relationship with the God of heaven and is growing in realization of just what his heavenly Father has really done for him.

(4) **Supplication and Intercession** (Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:2-3, 12; Phil. 4:6-7; 2 Tim. 2:1f). Effectual prayer for others, for oneself and family, for the nation and its leaders, and for the ministry of the church is crucial to all that the church is and does.

**Ordinances (identification with and proclamation of Christ's death, burial and resurrection)**
Water Baptism (Matt. 28:19; 1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is to be a public demonstration of a believer’s faith, understanding of his or her position in Christ with its ramifications, and this includes commitment to walk with Christ in newness of life. Water baptism is not to be confused with Spirit baptism which occurs the moment a person believes and is placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Lord's Table (Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:23-24). The Lord's Table (otherwise known as the communion service) should be designed to promote soul-searching, evaluation, and reflection on the Savior and what He means to us. It is a redeclaration, a testimony of one’s faith in Christ in both His first and second advents, a remembrance, an act of worship by which we remember and count on the person and work of Christ as the source and means of life, and an expression of the relationship of harmony and oneness of mind in love, values, and commitment that should exist in the body of Christ.

B. The Church Scattered (2 primary functions)

Being A Witness By Our Life & By Our Lips (Matt. 5:14-16; Col. 4:5-6; 1 Thes. 1:5b; Titus 3:1,8,14; 1 Pet. 2:12)

Making Associations - "Friendships" (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:33; John 4:4f; Gal. 6:10a; Tit. 3:14). Believers must be taught and encouraged to build bridges to and develop relationships with the lost. Penetrating society for contact is vital to evangelism. Christians must learn to help their neighbors, show mercy, and, according to their ability, give to those in need to demonstrate the love of Christ and build bridges for the gospel. All this is to be done while maintaining separation and keeping oneself "unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

Preserving (Matt. 5:13-16; 2 Thess. 2:6-7). The calling of the church is not to control the political process at local, state, or national levels, but to seek genuine moral reform through prayer and reaching our society for Christ, because it is impossible to achieve genuine and lasting political reform through legislation without spiritual regeneration.

Declaring the Gospel (Col. 4:3-4; 1 Thes. 1:5-8)

The Means—Personal Witnessing (Mark 16:15: Acts 1:8; Rom. 10:17; Luke 10:2). The church must be involved in an active ministry of sharing the gospel to the lost. This should involve an outreach to all ages and groups in order to fulfill the great commission.

The Methods—Sharing, Refuting, Reasoning, Persuading, Demonstrating, Proving (Acts 9:22; Rom. 10:13-17; 17:17; 18:4, 28; 19:8-9; 1 Thes. 1:5; 1 Pet. 3:15). While only the Spirit of God can illuminate a person’s heart to the truth of the Gospel and convict men of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11), God still uses the witness of the believer (Rom. 10:13-17). Members of God's workforce should therefore be exhorted to declare the Gospel fearlessly and clearly as Ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 6:19-20; Co. 4:3-4). We must see ourselves as seed sowers and trust God to produce a crop (1 Cor. 3:5-8).