

The Work Of The Church

Introduction. There is perhaps nothing more fitting than a study of the work of the Lord's church. Why is it here, what is its purpose, and toward what objectives should it strive? Of course, in speaking of the work of the church, we must speak of local congregations, for that is the only organized form in which the church can scripturally function.

People want change with the assumption that they can improve it or make it better. But the church is precious, and we need to emphasize repeatedly that the church has a divine arrangement with a divine purpose. This fact should dispel from every mind the common concept that the church was planned by human wisdom, brought into existence by human will, or is ruled by human authority. It should also remove any thought that we can change the Lord's church!

I. ***The Work Of The Church Is Not The Same As The Work Of A Christian***

- A. There is a sense in which every Christian is a member of the church 24 hours a day. Naturally, if we are Christians, we ought to be Christians all the time. So in the broadest sense of the term, we eat and sleep in the church and keep house in the church and carry on our secular work in the church.
- B. However, some take this line of reasoning too far.
 1. For example, if a mob shoots a man, while doing so they are citizens of the state. But just because those who did it were citizens of the state, does not mean that the man was shot by the state.
 2. Because people who do something are members of the church does not necessarily mean that the church is engaged in that activity. The work of the church is not the same as the work of the Christian. There are some actions which God wants us to do as individual Christians that would not be appropriate for the church to do.
- C. Many also mistakenly believe that every good work can be a work of the church. Bearing and raising children is a good work, but it is the work of the home instead of the work of the church. Arresting criminals is a good work, but the church should not be turned into a law enforcement agency.
- D. Furthermore, the home is just as much a divine institution as is the church.
 1. There are some activities which God would have us to do in and through the home and there are activities which God would have us to do in and through the church.
 2. There are matters which overlap between the church and the home. For example, God's truth should be taught in the home and God's

truth should be taught in the church. But each has its own unique and appropriate function (1 Timothy 5:16).

II. ***The Work Of A Local Congregation***

A. The church is to evangelize the lost.

1. It has been God's plan from eternity to save the world by the preaching of the gospel. All mankind is in need of salvation (Romans 3:23), and the gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16; James 1:21).
2. The church is God's agency in preaching the gospel. It is His "missionary agency." Local congregations were the only organization through which this work was done in first century days. The church at Philippi and Thessalonica were wonderful examples to other churches (Philippians 1:3-5; 2:25-30; 4:14-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:3-8). But congregational activity in evangelism did not preclude individual activity in this work (cf. Acts 5:42; 8:5; 18:24-26; 20:20).
3. The church never set up a "missionary society" to preach the gospel to the world. It never needed a central organization to make sure that the gospel was preached in new areas of the world.

B. The church is to help poor saints.

1. Benevolence was never used as a means of introducing the kingdom of God.
 - a) Benevolence is the fruit of the gospel, not the means of propagating it. Food and clothing were never offered by the early church as a means of getting people to hear and accept the gospel.
 - b) People who are attracted by benevolence will turn away when the benevolence is stopped for their conviction of the gospel is not based on a love of truth.
2. A lot of the teaching in the New Testament on this subject is directed to individuals and not to the congregation (Matthew 25:31-46; Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18).
3. There is a work of benevolence which churches of Christ can and should do in harmony with God's will. Congregations can provide for those among their number who are needy saints. The church in Antioch sent relief to the churches in Judea when they were stricken by famine (Acts 11:26; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
4. The church never set up a benevolent society or institution to care for the needy. Benevolence was done under the direction of the elders. No church handled the money of any other church. Other agencies in the world engage in general benevolent work with God's

- approval while only the church is to preach the gospel.
- C. The church is to edify itself.
1. The church is edified by the strengthening, growth, and development of its members. The purpose of every child of God is to do everything for the purpose of edification (1 Corinthians 14:26; Romans 14:19).
 2. The proper objective of the church is not numerical growth alone but the development of spiritual strength (Ephesians 4:14-15; 6:10-18; Hebrews 5:12-14).
 - a) We must grow in godliness (1 Timothy 4:8).
 - b) We must build ourselves up in the most holy faith (Jude 17-23).
 - c) We must resist the devil and draw near to God (James 4:7-10).
 3. The congregation may edify its members through worship (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 2:5), faithful teaching, proper discipline (Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Titus 3:10), and proper love and consideration of one another (1 Corinthians 3:3; 12:25; Ephesians 4:29-32; Philippians 2:3-4; 4:2).
 4. The church never set up an edification society such as a school or college to teach the gospel or secular subjects to young or old Christians.
- D. We are told that perhaps churches in the New Testament used institutions in the "background," but they were not specifically revealed. But you look at the evidence, the characteristics and work of the New Testament churches are revealed in great detail by Luke, Paul, John, and other writers. Could God have left out something so important to the work of His church?
- E. The church, as the only organization designed by the wisdom of God for these works, excludes any other organization or arrangement. Any substitute or additional order for this work arranged by the wisdom and will of man is a rejection of God's ways.

III. ***What Is Not The Work Of A Local Congregation***

- A. The mission of the church is not social and recreational. The gospel of Christ is not a "social gospel." The church of the Lord is not a "social institution," waging a campaign for social reformation or social equality. While the gospel, with its principles of truth, will work social reform, it does so by reforming the individual's living and thinking.
1. Paul taught that if the gospel found a man either a slave or a master, it was to make a better one out of him (1 Corinthians 7:20-22).
 2. He also taught that the home is to be the center of social activity -- not the church (1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

- a) The increasing tendency to socialize church services and church work by having "fellowship banquets," a social hour with refreshments after the service, a church dining room or cafeteria to entertain visitors and accommodate social functions is purely sectarian and leads directly to what Paul condemned with the Corinthians.
 - b) It is good when Christians associate and eat together but it should be kept within the home and individual Christian activity and not church activity.
3. It is not the work of the church to provide and serve as guide in recreational activity. Church basketball teams, church-sponsored skating parties, facilities for recreational games, etc., are a perversion of the energies and resources of the church. It is not the business of the church to furnish entertainment or recreation for any group.
- B. The church is not a court or school of domestic relations. Whatever the Bible teaches should be taught whenever and wherever it is needed. But parent education, psychology, sociology, and other related subjects that are not taught in the word of God are not the task of the church. Preachers who make a specialty of counseling those who are having difficulty in domestic relations and social problems should do that work in some other way than through the church.
 - C. The teaching of secular subjects such as science, mathematics, history, literature, etc., does not come within the scope of the mission and work of the church and should be made no part of its work.
 - D. Political issues do not belong in the church. God ordained civil government to meet all such issues and resolve them and they should be left there (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). The church is not a platform arena for political posturing.

Conclusion. No one has the right to take away from the energy, zeal, or resources of the church to serve human purposes. The church should be kept faithful to the divine work that was God's purpose from eternity for her to serve. It is God's all-sufficient instrument. If we deny the adequacy of the church to do the work God has assigned, we admit that Christ did not give the necessary gifts to get the job done. This type of thinking is a serious blow to the wisdom of God.