

THE

HARVESTER

"Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)

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THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

At one time or another, many of us have probably wondered, "What is the work of the church today?" By 'work' we mean the duties or responsibilities and the term 'church' refers to the body of believers who have been "called out" of darkness (Col. 1:13). Therefore, what we are really asking is this: Is my local congregation performing the duties it should and more importantly, am I doing my part? Every Sunday morning the church meets together to worship God and to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). We also assemble on Sunday and Wednesday evening for Bible study. But, is this all that the church must do?

Exactly what is the work of the church? Is it to operate missionary societies? Is it to

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establish schools for our children or is it to raise money by organizing bake sales? Is the church suppose to arrange into classes for the purpose of teaching the Bible? Or is it to sponsor a team for the basketball league? Yes, I would really like to know and I am sure others are interested, too.

There are several items that could be discussed in response to our question, if we will search the scriptures carefully. The New Testament is full of examples of the work that the early congregations of Christ's church fulfilled. But basically, these can be grouped into three areas of work: evangelism, benevolence, and edification. It was the duty of the church back then to carry out these 'works' and it is still a responsibility today. Let us now briefly study each of these.

EVANGELISM: Before the Lord added souls to the church (Acts 2:47), Christ told His apostles to 'evangelize' the entire world (Mark 16:15). This was to be a continuing process. The apostles would teach and convert strangers into disciples of Christ and in turn, these disciples would teach others the plan of salvation (Matt. 28:19-20). In effect, the spreading of the Gospel would be done "by the church." This was God's intention for thousands of years: the church would make it known to the world about God's infinite wisdom (Eph. 3:10). Obviously, this is a work that the church must continue to do today.

However, man has tried his best to keep the church from 'evangelizing' and spreading the Truth. A job that is suppose to belong to the whole congregation is one we try to pawn off on the men who preach sermons. We rarely seem to discuss Bible matters anymore because we take the attitude of, "Don't ask me about it, ask our preacher. It's his job." This is perhaps

more evident during the summer when we hold our "gospel meetings." The visiting evangelist comes in ready to work and we are so happy about that. But do we help him? Of course not! We sit around and expect this evangelist to go knock on everybody's doors and to fill up our church building. Yes, it is part of his duty to 'evangelize', but it is not his job alone! And it is not the work of a few dedicated Christians, either. It is the work of the church, meaning the whole congregation.

Then somehow, we consider the meeting a failure because "not everybody showed up" to hear the Gospel. Brethren, we cannot rely solely on the evangelist to make our meetings successful. The work of evangelizing must be done by all the members and it must be done months before the arrival of the meeting itself. A farmer does not plant a seed and expect to harvest a crop the very next day. It takes time and effort. Likewise, let us not expect a preacher to invite a person to the meeting and have that person baptized the very same night. Instead, every disciple must do his part to insure a fruitful 'revival' and then the church will be able to carry out this particular work (2 Tim. 4:2).

BENEVOLENCE: The church is also responsible for doing benevolent work. This means each member of the congregation must help his neighbor in times of need. If we fail to do that, then we are merely showing how dead our faith is (Jas. 2:14-16).

To prepare his people for the concept of benevolence, Jesus gave us such stories as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and the description of the last judgment (Matt. 25:34-40). Then the early church put these concepts into practice as they shared all their belongings (Acts 2:44-45). But the classic example of

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churches doing benevolent work is found in Acts 11:27-30. There was a real need among the saints at Judea because of the famine. So, Paul gave instructions *"to the churches of Galatia"* and to Corinth concerning their collection (1 Cor. 16:1-3). He did not address only the rich disciples nor a selected "committee"; he admonished the whole congregation! That was a work of the church.

Benevolent work is not necessarily confined to contributing money. In fact, it goes much deeper than digging into our pockets. Benevolent work is defined as *"doing good unto others"* (Matt. 7:12). It is kindness, charity, and gift-giving all rolled into one. It might mean giving a stranger a hot meal or cleaning the house for the widow next door. A benevolent church is one that takes care of the physical needs as well as the spiritual needs of its community. This is a duty we cannot take lightly for we read, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal. 6:10).

EDIFICATION: This may be the most neglected of all the works. We are all familiar with the type of person who always sees that everyone else is taken care of first before he tends to himself. My wife's grandmother, who passed away recently, was just like that. She would get so wrapped up in seeing that everyone else

had prepared their plate at mealtime that she would forget to get her own. In the same way, many congregations seem to neglect their own welfare. It is fine to help others, but let us not forget our own souls or the young person who was just recently baptized into Christ or the member who may be spiritually weak. Thus, it is very important that the church fulfill its responsibility of edification.

How is the church to edify itself? What can the members do? The Bible does mention a few things. The church can edify itself through teaching (1 Cor. 14:4), through its worship (1 Cor. 14:26), through encouragement and exhortations (Acts 9:31), through fellowship (1 Thess. 5:11), and through love (Eph. 4:16). In short, a congregation can build itself up when each member is willing to spend more time with his spiritual family. This means more than just attending the church services. It means going the extra mile for the right reasons. It means daily associations with fellow Christians and having activities that are spiritually wholesome. It also means that each disciple must become very unselfish and possess a sincere concern for others that is totally based on love. Is God asking too much of us in this respect? *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."* (Rom. 14:19) Yes, let each congregation strengthen itself.

God's Word is all too clear in defining the work of the church today. The local congregation is responsible for evangelism, benevolence, and edification. These duties cannot be delegated only to a certain few members. Everyone must do his fair share. Everyone cannot let his talent go to waste (Matt. 25:29). If one person in the congregation is neglecting his duty, then the church is not doing its work. Remember, to each of the seven

churches in Revelation, Christ said, "*I know thy works.*" I wonder, what does the record show for our own congregation?

RAY McMANUS

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES!

1. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, was from what city?
2. According to Isaiah, what would the Messiah eat when He was old enough to know right from wrong?
3. How much of his possessions did Zacchaeus say he would give to the poor?
4. What is wealth good for in the day of wrath?
5. How many Psalms contain the word "amen"?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH ...

and remember last month's questions?

1. When the ark was being moved to Jerusalem, who was struck dead when he touched it?
UZZAH (2 Sam. 6:7)
2. Where did Samson stay after he avenged the death of his wife? A CAVE IN THE ROCK OF
ETAM (Judges 15:8)
3. According to Romans 2, who has no excuse?
THOSE WHO PASS JUDGMENT ON SOMEONE ELSE
(Rom. 2:1)
4. What are the customs of people worth, according to Jeremiah? NOTHING (Jer. 10:3)
5. What is the shortest book in the N.T.?
II JOHN

IF A THING GOES WITHOUT SAYING, LET IT.

AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS

(A Series to Promote Church Attendance)

I go to every service of the Church to set a good example. Many are looking my way and following my steps. Influence is either good or bad -- there is no middle ground. Any hour the Church meets, my influence is with or against Christ. If I attend, it is for the Lord. When I neglect a service, my influence is for Satan.

I go to every service of the Church to prove my love and gratitude. So boundless was the love of Jesus for the church, He gave His life for it. If I would be His disciple, I must also prove my love. Since God has given me a multitude of blessings I do not deserve, it is indeed a small sacrifice to return a few hours in public worship. One who truly loves God does not ask if he must attend all services. His love compels him to! If I show love to God by attendance, I show lack of love by absence.

I go to every service of the Church to obey God. The Bible says, *"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together ..."* (Heb. 10:25). The first Christians met weekly and often daily (Acts 20:7; 2:45; 19:9). Any service where the Bible is taught, prayer is made, and God is worshipped, is good, and *"to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17). If it is good to be present for all services, it is bad to be absent from any.

I go to every service of the Church to put first things first. *"Seek ye first his kingdom ..."* (Matt. 6:33). Jesus said the church must be first to the Christian, even before seeking food, clothing, and drink. Nothing could be so important as being a faithful member of the Lord's church.

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BIBLE PRINCIPLES OF SALVATION

I. ALL PEOPLE HAVE SINNED

1 Ki 8:46 Rom 3:10 Rom 3:23 Rom 5:12 1 Jn 1:8 1 Jn 5:19

II. A SINNER WILL FACE ETERNAL DEATH

Ezek 33:8-9 Rom 6:23 2 Thes 1:7-9 Jas 1:15 Jas 5:20 Rev 21:8

Unless he:

1. Hears the Word of God
Matt 13:23 Lk 10:39 Jn 10:16 Rom 10:17 Eph 1:13 1 Thes 2:13
2. Realizes Jesus Christ is the Only Way to Eternal Salvation
Jn 6:68 Jn 14:6 Acts 4:12 Eph 2:18 1 Thes 5:9 Heb 5:9
3. Believes Jesus is the Son of God
Mk 16:16 Jn 3:16 Jn 8:24 Jn 20:31 Acts 10:43 Acts 16:31 Heb 11:6
4. Is Convicted in his Heart of his Own Disobedience
Acts 2:37 Acts 16:29 Acts 24:25 2 Cor 7:8-11
5. Repents of his Sins
Lk 13:3 Acts 2:38 Acts 3:19 Acts 17:30 Acts 26:20
6. Confesses his Faith in the Lord Jesus
Matt 10:32 Acts 8:37 Acts 19:18 Rom 10:9-10 Phil 2:11 1 Jn 4:15
7. Is Baptized by Immersion for the Remission of Sins in the
Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
Matt 28:19 Mk 16:16 Jn 3:5 Acts 2:38 Acts 8:36-39 Acts 10:47-48
Acts 16:33 Acts 22:16 Rom 6:3-6 Gal 3:27 Col 2:12 1 Pet 3:21
8. Lives a Faithful Life, Guided Only by the Authority of the NT
Matt 25:21 Rom 1:16 Tit 2:11-12 Heb 4:12 Jas 1:21 1 Jn 5:4 Rev 2:10
9. Worships in Spirit & Truth, not Forsaking the Assembling, and
Observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week
Matt 4:10 Jn 4:23-24 Acts 2:42 Acts 20:7 1 Cor 11:20-30 Heb 10:25
10. Prays for Forgiveness, if he should Fall into Sin again
Acts 8:22 1 Cor 10:12-13 Eph 6:18 1 Thes 5:17 Jas 5:15-16 1 Jn 1:5-10

III. ONLY THOSE WHO DO THE WILL OF GOD SHALL BE SAVED

Matt 7:21 Matt 12:50 Lk 6:47-48 Rom 2:13 Jas 1:22 1 Jn 2:17 Rev 22:14

ATTENTION READERS: In the coming months, this paper may possibly experience a few delays. This will be due to another relocation on my part. I am being transferred to the Gadsden, Ala. area. Please bear with me for any inconvenience this may cause. Thanks, the Editor.