



March 11, 2018

The Work Of The Church

Last week I defined the church as the collection of saved believers who have been added to the church. Believers who follow the pattern of obedience as given in the New Testament do not join the church but are placed in it by God who saves them (**Acts 2.47**). Once one is added to the church we have a responsibility to act in accordance with the commands and examples that we find in the New Testament. As we examine the scriptures we find that there is a difference between what the individual must do and what we do collectively. Remember in the last article I stated the church is not an organization in the sense we think of one. There is a structure to the church but that is another discussion. In this article I'll take a look at what the scriptures describe as the work of the collective body.

First of all we know that Christians met on the first day of the week as we see in **Acts 20.7**. On the first day of the week members in local congregations or groups engaged in specific activities. They prayed together, taught or preached the word, observed the Lord's supper or communion, sang songs and laid by in store for the needs of the work that was being done (**1 Cor 16.1-2**, **2 Cor 9.7-9**). We understand this to be the nature of a worship service on each first day of the week which was the day Christ rose from the dead. By meeting together and engaging in these activities on the Lord's day in addition to meeting on other days to study the word and fellowship with each other we find there are certain functions the church fulfills.

Edification

Paul describes the church collectively as the "***pillar and ground of the truth***" as he instructs Timothy on how to conduct himself. The church is identified as the body of saved believers who uphold and teach the truth. James warns that if any man teaches we should be aware that we will receive a "***greater condemnation***" for leading others astray (**James 3.1**). This is a solemn duty as God has entrusted his word into the hands of stewards who must be faithful (**1 Cor 4.1-2**) because we are the "***earthen vessels***" who are charged to teach the word (**2 Cor 4.7**). A failure to teach God's word correctly will not only condemn those who teach error but also those led astray by the false doctrines. In order to accomplish this on an individual basis the church therefore edifies the members by our collective meeting together regularly to remember the Lord and to strengthen our knowledge and faith. The writer of Hebrews brings this out very well when he writes, "***And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.***" (**Heb 10.24-25**). As we assemble we study together, learn together, encourage each other and urge one another on to "***love and good works***". The writer here also emphasizes and condemns those who fail to meet with the collective body on a regular basis. There are many in the religious world who believe they can be a child of God and either intermittently or never enter the assembly. There are members of the Lord's church that have this attitude as well but this is condemned as we have just seen. From a common sense perspective it doesn't seem logical to become a Christian and then never want to be around our brothers and sisters or completely neglect that aspect of our service to God.

Evangelism

Christ told his disciples, "***Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.***" (**Matt 28.19-20**). Christians are the means by which the Gospel is spread throughout the world. That is done on an individual basis when we come in contact with



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others and have opportunities to engage with them in a discussion about their souls. Collectively the body of believers do this when we gather together and study the word or hear it proclaimed by a preacher. As we do this we edify and exhort one another but we also provide opportunities for those who are not Christians to hear the Gospel proclaimed. The collective meeting of the saints is for the benefit of the local group but certainly those who are not saved are more than welcome to access such times to hear the word of God. As I noted above those who fail to meet with the saints regularly are depriving themselves of edification and are not urged onward to love and good works by their neglect. I will also note that the teaching of the collective body which occurs when we meet together is focused on the need of the group whereas individuals who seek to teach the lost are to go to them and create those situations where one who has never heard the truth will be able to do so.

Benevolence

In a later article I will go into much more detail about the work of church in regard to benevolence but at this point we can say that the focus of the early church was on the care for the needs of the members of the body. We find that as the church grew those who had abundance gave so that those who were in need were not lacking (**Acts 2.44-45**). In other instances in the New Testament we find that Christians met the needs of other Christians as we find in Paul's writings. "*But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.*" (**Rom 15.25-26**). In this case, and from what we find in **1 Cor 16.1-2** as well as **2 Cor 9.7-9**, congregations in Macedonia and Achaia had collected funds for needy Christians in Jerusalem and as noted Paul was delivering that to them. When we discuss this in more depth we will find that the church provided relief for the needs of other Christians but there is a way in which that was done and limits on what was to be done. Before we discuss that however we need to take a look at the structure or organization of the church. Although the church is not an "organization" such as a corporation there is a structure to the church in which roles are defined. This is done to preserve the integrity of what is believed and taught and to watch over the flock of believers to safeguard their souls. We'll talk about the organization of the church in the next article.

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