

The Work of the Church

John Isaac Edwards

The Lord has always had work for His people to do. To Adam was given the job of dressing and keeping a garden (Genesis 2:15). Noah was commissioned to make an ark (Genesis 6:14). The children of Israel were instructed to build the tabernacle (Exodus 25:8-9). Under the leadership of Solomon, there was the building of the temple (1 Kings 6-8). During the period of return and restoration, we find the Lord's people with “a mind to work” (Nehemiah 4:6).

As we come to the New Testament, we meet the Lord as a worker. He said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4). The Lord's church is set forth in the figure of a vineyard as a place of work. In the Parable of the Labourers, Christ represented the kingdom as an householder going out early in the morning to “hire labourers into his vineyard” (Matthew 20:1). Church members are exhorted to be involved in the work of the Lord, as Paul wrote the Corinthians, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The Work of the Church Is Spiritual in Nature. The nature of the work of the church is in keeping with the character of its architect - “God is a Spirit...” (John 4:24) - and the mission of the Lord who built it (Mat-

thew 16:18) and “purchased” it “with his own blood” (Acts 20:28), whose coming was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Peter described the church as “a spiritual house” (1 Peter. 2:5). The church is not a fun house where one may expect to be amused and entertained. It is not a social club as the home instituted by God at the beginning is the center and circle of social activity (Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34). Paul said, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17). Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world...” (John 18:36). The church does not exist for a political purpose as “the powers that be are ordained of God” for such matters (Romans 13). When the church turns aside from her divine program of work to such activities and interests, she has lost sight of her spiritual nature and purpose. And this is exactly where most churches are today. Banquets, concerts, dinners, sports contests, and on it goes (you name and they do it) have taken the place of “Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The Work of the Church Is Directed by Christ. Christ has “all authority in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). Paul wrote of Christ that God “hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body...” (Ephesians 1:22-23). As such, “the church

is subject unto Christ” (Ephesians 5:24). We have been taught to “observe all things” commanded by Christ (Matthew 28:20) and to “do all in the name of” Christ or by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Where has Christ directed His saved body of people to plan, promote or provide for food, fun and frolic? Let’s simply do that which Christ, the Head of the church, has directed us as His body to do, and leave off everything else.

The Work of the Church Is Threefold in Scope. Christ gave gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) to make the church sufficient “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:7-16). In the New Testament, we find local churches engaged in these works:

Evangelism. The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The church of the Thessalonians “sounded out the word of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The church at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria (Acts 8) and Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:22). The church at Antioch sent Paul, Barnabas and others on evangelistic trips which resulted in souls being saved and churches established (Acts 13-21). The church at Philippi sent to Paul as he preached Christ in Thessa-

lonica (Philippians 4:15-16). This is referred to as “fellowship” (Philippians 1:5).

Edification. The Lord has made provision for “the edifying” of the body (Ephesians 4:16). Edification comes from divine revelation (1 Corinthians 14). Paul commended the Ephesians to “God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Relief. In New Testament days, the church took care of its needy (Acts 2; 4; 6). The church at Antioch sent “relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea” (Acts 11:27-30). This work of the church is limited in the Scriptures to saints. Paul wrote about “the collection for the saints” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). It is even limited among saints as 1 Timothy 5:16 records, “If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.” This shows a difference between what an individual Christian may do and what the church as such may do, and defeats the idea that the church may do whatever an individual Christian does.

Let’s all get involved in doing the Lord’s work the Lord’s way!

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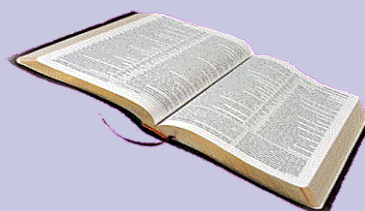
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