

Lesson 5: *Work of the Church of Christ*

It is easy to see that the work of most denominations is infected with the social gospel ideals of serving the felt needs of the whole man, rather than focusing upon the true needs of his spirit. The New Testament epistles and the book of the Acts of the Apostles gives modern man a pattern for the scope and limitations of the church's work, showing us those that things that are authorized and those that are human innovations. The work of the church can be summed up in three categories: edification of the saved, evangelism to the lost and benevolence to the needy saint. When the work of the church is discussed, we primarily have in mind the use of the local treasury and assemblies.

The apostles constantly encouraged Christians to strive after personal growth and the local congregation was given a role in that objective. The Hebrew writer marked those who forsook the assembling of the saints, because such an attitude showed apathy toward the souls of one's brethren (Heb. 10:24-25). The assembling of the saints is to exhort one another and stir up love and good works.

In addition, the local church is to be overseen by elders, who take the special responsibility of shepherding that flock and watching out for its souls (Acts 20:28-31, Heb. 13:7-17). They are to ensure that the flock among them is well fed with the milk and meat of Gods' word (Titus 2:1-8) through competent and scriptural preaching and teaching. The local church may expend funds to meet this objective through supporting preaching (1 Cor. 9:14, 1 Tim. 5:17-18), purchasing teaching materials and funding a meeting place.

The early church at Philippi provides an example of supporting men who evangelize the lost in that they supported Paul on his journeys (Phil. 4:15-16). He explained this to the Corinthians, making it plain that local churches were authorized and obligated to support such evangelistic efforts (2 Cor. 11:8-9). An evangelist is needed wherever there are lost souls (Rom. 10:14-15) and the church may support those men who make this their life's work.

It is important to note that the support of preaching, if perverted, can provide the seeds of denominationalism, or at least digression from scriptural authority. Funds were never transferred from one church to another in order to support evangelism. The concepts of a missionary society, a separate organization supported by any number of churches to do what should have been the work of the church, is foreign to God's word. The modern concept of the sponsoring church, in which one church receives contributions from a number of churches, in order to evangelize on a greater scale is equally unauthorized. When a church desired to support evangelism in other places, the funds were disbursed directly to the preacher, not some middle man or organization.

Today, most people think that the church's mission is to feed and clothe the poor and pay the bills for everyone who knocks on the door. Preaching the gospel is a secondary consideration. The New Testament, however, limited what a congregation could do for the poor and needy by giving only examples of benevolence provided to needy saints. A contribution was raised (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and delivered by the hands of a messenger either to the elders of a devastated congregation or such saints as were in need (2 Cor. 8:1-4, 9:12-14). The church was limited even in its aid to widows due to the "indeed" clause of Paul in 1 Timothy 5:3-16, where we also learn that the first responsibility for benevolence lies with the family. The church has no obligation or authority to provide benevolence funds to anyone who is not a member of the body of Christ.

1. How are the elders of a local church to provide for the edification of the flock among them?
2. What part does assembling play in edification (Heb. 10:24-25, Col. 3:16-17)?
3. What authority does a local church have to provide a meeting place?
4. What authority does the church have to pay someone to preach?
5. What is to be made known by the church (Eph. 3:10)?
6. What does Paul mean by saying that he robbed other churches in 2 Corinthians 11:8-9?
7. How did he sum up the preacher's importance in Romans 10:14-15?
8. What is a missionary society? What is a sponsoring church? Are they scriptural methods? Why?
9. Does the church's mission to evangelize the lost justify the use of banquet facilities, dramatic presentations, entertainment features and exercise rooms to lure people (John 6:6:26-27, Rom. 1:16, 1 Tim. 4:8)? What may be true of the religion and conversions of those so drawn?
10. In what ways is a congregation limited in its work of benevolence?
11. How may benevolence funds be disbursed?
12. Who holds the first responsibility in cases of benevolence needs?