

The Work of the Church

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The church of Jesus Christ was foretold of in prophecy and referred to as the kingdom of God (Isa. 2:2ff; Dan. 2:44; Mk. 9:1; etc.). It can be easily determined that the kingdom (church) that the prophets spoke of was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter preached the gospel in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (i.e., the law went forth from Jerusalem; cf. Isa. 2:2ff). Those who heard the law (gospel truths) were called to obey (cf. Acts 2:38-39; II Thess. 2:13-14). Those answering the call of the gospel were added to the kingdom of God (i.e., the church) (I Thess. 1:12). The church is comprised of individuals who faithfully follow the teachings of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:18-19; II Jn. 9). Jesus is all in all in the church (Eph. 1:23). He is the head (Eph. 5:23), the body (Eph. 1:22-23), and the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:18ff). The church is a spiritual organization (Rom. 14:17; Eph. 4:11ff) designed to “*fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea*” (Hab. 2:14). The church of Christ is organized with elders, deacons, preachers, and members to accomplish its work. The word organization is defined as “something comprising elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions” (AHD 876). This lesson shall examine the work of the church of Christ.

I. God’s Word Reveals a WORK for the Church:

A. **Evangelize** the community and world as possible (Matt. 13:3-9; Mt. 20:1-16; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Cor. 11:8-9).

1. This work is not limited to any given locality. When churches sent men out to preach they were not trying to be territorial and neither were they trying to violate any other local church’s autonomy, they were only fulfilling a commandment of God.
2. The church in Philippi supported Paul while he traveled about preaching to the lost (Phil. 4:15; II Cor. 11:8-9).
3. The church in Antioch of Syria supported and sent out Paul, Barnabas, John Mark and Silas throughout Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 13:1ff; 15:36ff).
4. The church in Corinth supported local preachers (I Cor. 9:1-14).
5. Philip the evangelist preached in Caesarea Judea for ~ 24 years, married and had four daughters and was no doubt supported by the brethren as an “*evangelist*” (cf. Acts 8:40; 21:8).
6. Church in Jerusalem supported Barnabas (Acts 11:22).
7. The church where the apostle John was a member had sent out preachers to preach where Gaius and Diotrephes worshipped (III Jn. 5-6).
8. The work of evangelizing is planting the seeds of the Gospel to the lost (I Cor. 1:21; 3:6-7).

B. **Edify** its members:

1. To edify is “a building or construction process” (LS 546; AG 558).
2. Christians are commanded to grow spiritually as individuals (Eph. 3:14-15; II Tim. 2:15; Heb. 6:1ff; II Pet. 1:5; 3:18).

3. Failure to grow spiritually ends in spiritual death (Hosea 4:6; Isaiah 5:13; 33:14; 59:2; Rom. 10:2).
 4. Spiritual growth gives way to a healthy fear of God and more understanding. Job said, “*Behold, the fear of the Lord is wisdom and to depart from evil is understanding*” (Job 28:28). Solomon said, “*The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction*” (Prov. 1:7).
 5. The work of the church is to promote spiritual growth with its members. When all are growing spiritually unity is the consequence (Eph 4:11-16; Col. 2:18-19; I Cor. 14:26; Rom. 14:19; II Tim. 4:1-5; I Tim. 2:14-16, 23-26; II Pet. 3:18; Heb. 10:24-25). The elder, preacher, deacon, and member have this responsibility in the church.
- C. Benevolence:** Benevolence is a broad term that may be summarized by the phrase ‘bearing burdens.’
1. The word burden “denotes a weight, anything pressing on one physically, Matt. 20:12, or that makes a demand on one’s resources, whether material (I Thess. 2:6-9), spiritual (Rev. 2:24 [Gal. 6:1-2jcr]) or religious (Acts 15:28)” (Vines 149).
 2. The NT reveals limitations for the church when it comes to its work of benevolence and bearing burdens. The limitations found are that the church is authorized to help needy SAINTS alone (i.e., no one of the world). In every example of the church providing benevolent care in the NT, the source of the need was either a local or universal saint in need. When any one given local church provided benevolent care for members of churches elsewhere they were not violating those needy churches autonomy. They were simply fulfilling a commandment of God.
 3. The church was never intended to be a relief society for the whole world’s needy. Jesus said, “*the poor you have with you always*” (Matt. 26:11). The church can do nothing to eliminate poverty and need on a world scale.
 - a. The church is authorized to help those widows who meet the qualifications of I Tim. 5.
 - b. The church is authorized to spend the treasury on needy saints in the local church and the universal church (Acts 4:32, 6:1; 11:29; Rom. 15:25-26; I Cor. 16:1ff; II Cor. 8:4; 9:1, 12).

II. The WORK of the church is NOT:

- A. To be a relief society for all walks of life:
 1. Some believe there is no difference between the work of the church and the individual; i.e., what the individual must do so the church must do. The reasoning is that if the individual is to care for the needy of the world it is the church’s duty (cf. James 1:27).
 2. Consider I Tim. 5:16; Matt. 18:15ff for a distinction between church and individual.
- B. To provide entertainment in social settings for lonely people, senior citizens, singles, teenagers, etc. (Rom. 14:17).

C. To serve as a secular education tool teaching mathematics, sciences, geography, sociology, psychology, etc. (cf. Eph. 4:11ff).

Concluding thoughts:

The church of Jesus Christ is indeed the pillar of truth (I Tim. 3:15). The work of the church is dictated by truth. Said work is in the area of evangelizing, edifying, and caring for needy saints.