

The Work of The Church #2 (What The Work Is Not)

Introduction:

- I. We are involved in a series of lessons dealing with the work of the church. On last week we emphasized some things that we must keep before us throughout this series of lessons.
 - **The church is made up of those who obey the gospel (Rom. 1:16).**
 - **The church is viewed from two standpoints (universal and local).**
 - **The local church has a God-given organizational structure (Phil. 1:1).**

- II. The local church has been given a work to do. That work is simply this—evangelism, benevolence and edification. This is the three-fold work of the church (**Eph. 4:12**). We will begin looking at this on next week. But the question that I want to ask and answer right now is, “What makes something the work of the church?”
 - A. **Something planned, provided and participated in by the LOCAL CHURCH.**

Here I want to emphasize that in this series of lessons **WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT THE DISTRIBUTIVE WORK OR ACTIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT RATHER THE COLLECTIVE WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.** Many local churches of Christ have failed in abstaining from unauthorized practices because they have failed to see the distinction between the individual Christian and the church. Here are some examples of this:

“There are those who try to distinguish between the work of the church and the work of Christians, indicating one to be divine, the other human. This is fallacious reasoning. The church is composed of Christians; what the church does, Christians do; what Christians do, the church does, generally speaking. We cannot separate the Christian’s work from the work of the church” (*V.E. Howard, tract: Institutionalism Orphan Homes and Church Cooperation, p. 5*).

“Actually we may say that whatever is the duty of the Christian is the duty of the congregation of Christians” (**Howard, op cit., p. 7, via Goodman, op cit, p. 3**).

“Consciously or otherwise we make a distinction between the church and Christians, and much of our reasoning is based upon this unproved assumption” (**O.H. Tallman, “Churches – individuals – Institutions,” The Gospel Guardian, Feb. 15, 1951, p. 8**).

Well, let me say that this sentiment is just flat out wrong. The distinction between the individual Christian and the church is not an unproved assumption, but rather it is a clear scriptural fact (**1 Tim. 5:16; Matt. 16:18:15-18**).

B. Something supported out of the treasury of the local church.

How is the church to raise money? The Bible tells us (**1 Cor. 16:1-2**). When one gives his or her money on the first day of the week, that money, from that point forward, belongs to God (**Acts 5:1-4**), and we can only do with it what has been authorized by the Word of God.

Let's remember this: the church is a divine institution. The church is not something that was just thought up by man, it was in the mind of God from the beginning (**Eph. 3:10**). When the church gets into things not authorized by God, who is it that is glorified? It's not God because He has nothing to do with it. If God is to be glorified and His wisdom revealed, we must do what He has told us to do, how He has told us to do it, when He has told us to do it, and no more than that.

Lesson:

The problem in the religious world today is that folks think that the local church can do anything it wants so long as the end result is not bad. Therefore we find local churches doing many things that are unscriptural, unauthorized, and contrary to God's pattern. Let's take a quick look at what the work of the church is not:

I. Not to bring about a social reformation, nor to be a social institution involved in social activities.

The gospel is not a social gospel. There is an ever growing demand on the part of people to socialize the church by building fellowship halls, having social hours with refreshments and accommodating social functions of various kinds. Mr. Harry Golden, a Jewish writer, expressed the idea that many have concerning the church in Life magazine when he wrote the following:

"If I were faced today with the decision my ancestors faced – become a Christian or die – I would pick a church fast. There is nothing to offend me in the modern church. The minister gives a sermon on juvenile delinquency one week, reviews a movie next week, then everyone goes downstairs and plays bingo. The first part of the church they build nowadays is the kitchen..."

This article was written in 1958, and it has continued to get worse, Paul condemned this socializing spirit (**1 Cor. 11:22**). Not only is it not the church's work to get involved in these social functions, it is not its job to heal all of the physical ills of society either (**1 Cor. 7:20-22**).

- II. Not to provide recreation (Ball teams, basketball courts, movies, etc.).**
- III. Not to provide secular education (build colleges, pre-schools, etc.).**

It is not the work of the church to teach children their ABC's and 123's. Remember, when we get involved in a social gospel only man is glorified. I know of one church where they have every kind of program under the sun in the church budget: **Christian Academy, Multi-Crisis Center, Behavior Modification, Drug Counseling, Family Counseling, Student at Risk Counseling, Juvenile Counseling, Grief Counseling, Prison Ministry, School Based Intervention, After School Care, Tutorial Assistance, Alternative Education, Value Training, bible Clubs, Mentoring Program, Listeners Program, Marriage Program, G.E.D. Diplomas.**

- IV. Not to go into the money raising business.**

The only authorized method of raising money is by the first day of the week offering (**1 Cor. 16:1-2**).

Conclusion:

While most of these things have become very popular in religious circles, they are not a part of the work that God gave the church to do. It matters not how many local churches put these kinds of things in the churches budget. It makes no difference how many people view these things as good works for the church to engage in. They are additions to the pattern that God has set forth. They can only be accomplished by going beyond the Word of God and acting without authority. And remember, we must have Bible authority for all that we do (**Col. 3:17; Heb. 8:1-5**).