

## **The Work of the Church #3 (Evangelism)**

### **Introduction:**

- I. For the last few weeks we have been studying the Work of the church. We have basically been dealing with some preliminary issues and haven't yet elaborated on the work itself. But this morning we are going to look specifically at what the work of the church is and to begin examining each work individually. Before we do that though, we must review the important points we made on last week.
  
- II. Last week we emphasized what makes something the work of a local church and we suggested that two things.
  - Something planned, provided and participated in by the local church.
  - Something supported out of the treasury of the local church.

Then we looked at what the work of the church is not in which we suggested four things. It not the work of the church to:

- Bring about a social reformation, nor to be a social institution involved in social, civil or political activities
- Provide recreation and entertainment
- Provide secular education
- To go into the money raising business

### **Lesson:**

#### **I. What Is The Work of The Church?**

In **Eph. 4:11, 12** we have the work of the church set forth. The work of the church is three-fold: **Evangelism, Benevolence, and Edification**. Now let's remember, the church is a divinely established and divinely organized institution (**Eph. 2:10**). The church must be satisfied with doing what God authorized for her to do through His Word and nothing more.

#### **II. Evangelism Is The Work of The Church.**

The work of the church is an extension and continuation of the work of Christ. His mission was to seek and save the lost. That is still a work that the church must engage in today. Since individuals are saved by the gospel (**Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14**), the work of the church is to preach the gospel (**Acts 11:22-24; Phil. 4:15-17, 2:25; 2 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Thess. 1:7, 8**).

These are all wonderful examples of the church, that is local churches, in action. They were all evangelistic minded. I like especially the last example of the brethren at Thessalonica. They didn't simply do evangelistic work by sending money to evangelists who were afar, they evangelized their own community by telling people they came into contact with about Jesus. I would to God that we would ever try to emulate, imitate and duplicate the church in Thessalonica and be actively involved in telling people about Jesus. Why isn't the church growing in some places? One reason is because we are neglecting to do the work of the church. We are keeping the gospel to ourselves, and that is not going to save anyone. The gospel is meant to be spread (**Matt. 28:19-20**). If we truly believe in the gospel and its ability to save, we won't keep it to ourselves (**2 Cor. 4:13; Jas. 1:21; Psa. 19:7**).

This is what the parable of the sower is all about (Mt. 13:1-20). Of several lessons in this parable, one is vital: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. This is 'the parable of the sower' (Mt. 13:18), not just the hearers. Both for His disciples and the multitudes, Jesus taught a basic lesson about His kingdom: its establishment and growth would be accomplished through teaching. Why? Because faith cometh by the word of God (**Rom. 10:13-17**). LET'S PREACH THE WORD!

### **III. Evangelism Must Be Done Scripturally.**

We started this series by emphasizing the need for Bible authority for all that we do (**Col. 3:17**). We must follow the divine pattern that has been set forth by God, even in the area of evangelism (**Heb. 8:1-5**). Over the years some churches have gone beyond this pattern of evangelism set forth in the New Testament, and have practiced evangelism in a way that has destroyed local autonomy. Oddly enough, this began among churches of Christ during the restoration period (1800-1850) at which time the church of Christ was the fastest growing church in the world. In the beginning of this period, men like Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott began to leave denominationalism and stand for the truth. The problem was they brought some of their denominational ideas with them, one being their view that the universal church is made up of churches. So, in the 1830s "Cooperation Meetings" became popular and that eventually led to the first institution established among churches of Christ—the American Christian Missionary Society, established in 1849 with Alexander Campbell as its first head. Those who opposed the Missionary Society called themselves conservatives, whereas they were called antis by the advocates of the Society.

In the 1950's the Highland church of Christ in Abilene Texas began the Herald of Truth radio program. By the 1960's this program appeared on some 317 radio stations, and even expanded to television, appearing on

some 65 stations from coast to coast. This program was supported financially by hundreds of local churches but the work was overseen by the elders of the Highland church. The result was that the elders of one local church were overseeing a portion of the work of several other congregations. That practice is unscriptural (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). It destroys local autonomy. The Highland church of Christ in that kind of arrangement becomes a sponsoring church. In the New Testament, however, there was no such thing as a sponsoring church. Each congregation did its own work in evangelism (chart on sponsoring church in Evangelism).

#### IV. God's Pattern On The Work of Evangelism.

God's pattern is the sum total of God's word on the subject. The pattern is given in the passages cited upon. Let's see what we find.

1. The supporting church or churches sent directly to the preacher (**Phil. 4:15**).
2. The supporting church or churches selected their own messenger or messengers by whom they sent the support (**Phil. 2:25**).
3. The preacher received the support from the hands of the messenger of the supporting church (**2 Cor. 11:8, 9; Phil. 4:16-18**).
4. The preacher received that which was his own personal wages, and for his own need (**2 Cor. 11:8**).
5. Sometimes one church supported the preacher, and sometimes more than one did so (**2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:15**).
6. No church ever sent to another church for the purpose of supporting the preaching of the gospel. Each supporting church sent directly to the preacher.

#### V. The Church at Philippi Was Not A Sponsoring Church!

It is sometimes argued that we do have a Bible example of a sponsoring church in the New Testament. Some brethren say that the church at Philippi was a sponsoring church. The argument goes like this: Paul said to the saints at Philippi, *A...no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only* (Phil. 4:15). Then in 2 Cor. 11:8 Paul said, *All robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do your service.* The other churches were churches of Macedonia because Paul talks of brethren coming from Macedonia in 2 Cor. 11:9. So the contention is that the churches of Macedonia sent money to the church at Philippi, and they

sent money to Paul; hence, the church at Philippi was a sponsoring church. However, there are two major problems with this theory. First, the chronology of the book of Acts will not allow for such an interpretation. The two times under consideration are two totally different times, and a careful investigation of Acts we demonstrate such. But second, this theory would involve Paul in a most unfair situation. The word *Acommunicated*≡ in ver. 15 means, according to Thayer, *to come into communion or fellowship with.*≡ Now, Paul says clearly that the Philippians were the only who communicated with him, i.e., they were the only ones to have fellowship with Paul in giving and receiving. Now notice how that would look if church at Philippi was a sponsoring church (**chart taken from *Walking By Faith***).

Now, why is all this business of following the pattern important? First of all because has always demanded that His people follow His instructions precisely (**Gen. 4:1ff**). Secondly, because once we allow a centralization of churches in one area such as evangelism, what's going to stop us from accepting a centralization of churches in other areas, and then finally all areas. And once we accept that, what are we but just another denomination composed of a church of churches.

## **VI. Congregational Activity in Evangelism Did Not Relieve Individual Christians From Responsibility To Evangelize (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 8:5; Acts 11:19, 20).**

### **Conclusion:**

Let's first make sure that we as a church are involved in the work of evangelism. And then let's also make sure that the work that we are doing is scriptural and in accordance with the pattern set forth on the pages of inspiration.