

## ***The Work of the New Testament Church***

Surveying the religious landscape you will find churches sponsoring ball teams, building gymnasiums and bowling alleys, offering day care, diet and exercise programs and musical and dramatic performances, and engaged in political activism. In contrast, when you read the New Testament you discover that the work of the church was spiritual in nature.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Paul wrote that "the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The universal church (i.e., the body of all saved people) has no earthly organization. Thus, any discussion of the work of the church would only concern the local church (congregation).

The work of local churches is found in the New Testament and is very simple in nature.

### **Preaching the Gospel - The Work of Evangelism**

The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas away to preach the gospel (Acts 13:2-3). When they returned, they gathered the church and "reported all that God had done with them, and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). The new congregation at Thessalonica was commended by Paul because "from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth" (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The church at Philippi had "fellowship in the gospel" with Paul (Philippians 1:5) and "sent once and again for my necessities" (Philippians 4:15-16). Indeed, the church is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). Evangelism is the very life's blood of the local church.

### **Edification - The Work of Growth**

Paul wrote that God had provided everything necessary for the "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). Christians must be taught the word of God so that they may "grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ." Each member of the body is then to contribute his strength for the "growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16). To that end, local churches should plan occasions for the gospel to be preached, Bible classes, training sessions, and suitable worship periods so that every local member may be challenged to reach his/her full potential as mature and knowledgeable disciples.

### **Benevolence - The Work of Relief**

Early in the history of the church at Jerusalem there was an occasion when some of the believers experienced need. On a voluntary basis, that need was met as some Christians even sold property to provide assistance (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37). Later there were a great number of widows in need, and the church appointed special servants to administer this service (Acts 6:1-7). No outside organizations were needed. The church did not seek government assistance. The church simply took care of its own. Later there was a case of greater need than the local church could meet (because of a famine), and congregations as far away as Greece sent messengers with their help. Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9; Romans 15:26-27. Family members were first to provide for their own (1 Timothy 5:8). "If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those that are really widows" (1 Timothy 5:16).

What a contrast this is to the frantic promotion of the social gospel activities found among the many churches today. Let the church be the church. Let it do the divine work for which it was appointed.

**- by Frank Himmel**

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## ***'Wounded at the Theater'***

"If you see a shameless woman in the theater, who treads the stage with uncovered head and bold attitudes dressed in garments adorned with gold, flaunting her soft sensuality, singing immoral songs, throwing her limbs about in the dance, and making shameless speeches...do you

still dare to say nothing human happens to you then? Long after the theater is closed and everyone is gone away, those images still float before your soul—their words, their conduct, their glances, their walk, their positions, their excitation, their unchaste limbs---and as for you, you go home covered with a thousand wounds!

But not alone---the shameless woman goes with you---although not openly and visible but in your heart, and in your conscience, and there within you she kindles the Babylonian furnace in which the peace of your home, the purity of your heart, and the happiness of your marriage will be burnt up!"

- by *John Chrysostom (349-407 A.D.)*

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### ***“Forever”***

A highway billboard down the road advertises for a local restaurant. Along with promises of "good home cookin" and "friendly service" is the proclamation "OPEN FOREVER". This caught our eye. It was not the typical "open 24 hours per day", or "open seven days per week". This was a far bolder claim. Forever, as you know, is a very long time!

While we may chuckle at, and even appreciate, the originality of the folks at that restaurant, we know - and surely they know - that nothing in this world is forever. James wrote:

*"Come now, you who say 'today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit'. Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanisheth away" (James 4:13,14 NASV).*

Sadly, too many of God's own children – who are supposed to know better – still act as though their plans, their activities, and their very lives will go on forever. These Christians become totally involved with their work, their recreation, making money, having fun, etc. In the process they woefully neglect their spiritual service to God. Can it be that they have forgotten that nothing here is forever?

Jesus told of a successful businessman who said to himself, I have *"much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry"*. He imagined that his prosperity could last "forever". But God said, *"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee"* (Luke 12:16-21). Many still need that lesson.

- by *Greg Gwin*