

The Work of a church of Christ

A local church of Christ is composed of saints. In a mature church, some of these saints are bishops, and some are deacons, Philippians 1:1. The organization implied in these words indicates that a local church of Christ is to work, collectively. Each member of this church will have "good works" he/she is personally to perform; but there is work to be done by the church, the "collective", and this is the purpose of the organization.

Our consideration of the work that a church of Christ properly does will be drawn from precepts announced, and the description of the things churches did, in the New Testament. Some sneer at this, deriding the idea that the behavior of people two thousand years ago in a cultural situation far removed from ours should be any kind of guide for us. The problem with these folk is that they do not understand that it is not the behavior of those brethren in the first century that fascinates us, but the direction from God that promoted such behavior. If someone finds such a response to Scripture to be too restrictive, so be it. It is the response God prescribed. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they should "learn by us not to go beyond what is written ..." (I Corinthians 4:6); and so must we all.

A church of Christ works to spread the gospel.

Such a mission, the burden of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), was embraced by local churches. Barnabas and Saul were sent on their first preaching tour by the church at Antioch, at the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). As he later worked in preaching the gospel Paul was assisted by the church at Philippi, with whom he had "partnership in the gospel from the first day unto now" (Philippians 1:5). He further says to them, "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again" (4:15, 16). With this kind of concern for the spread of the gospel, we are not surprised that before the pen of inspiration is laid down for the last time we read of the gospel being preached "everywhere" (Mark 16:20). Paul writes of "the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven ..." (Colossians 1:23). The gospel, the power of God to save, is the most precious message the world can know: and a church of Christ has no higher aim than to be preaching that gospel in every way possible.

A church of Christ seeks to edify.

One who becomes a Christian is likened to a newborn (John 3:3-7; I Peter 1:23; I Corinthians 3:1). As delightful as a baby is, we nonetheless expect to see it grow and develop, and anxiously watch for physical advance. By the same token, the babe in Christ is expected to put aside spiritual dependence in the process of maturing. Because some had not, the writer of Hebrews said, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (5:12-14).

The Lord expects that, after a reasonable time, "we may no longer be children". So He made provision for the local church to edify, to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ..." (Ephesians 4:12-15).

So, the local church provides opportunities of Bible study, and more formal gatherings for worship, as well as spiritual oversight in those situations where qualified men serve as elders. As far as its members are concerned, edification is the most important activity a church can pursue.

A church of Christ works in benevolence.

A Christian is moved by the plight of the needy, and as he has opportunity and ability he tries to alleviate that need. However, Scripture indicates that churches' benevolent assistance should

be given to "the saints" (Romans 15:26; I Corinthians 16:2, et al). The apostles said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2). Things pertaining to the eternal are more important than things that pertain to the temporal. Jesus said, "For you always have the poor with you" (Mark 14:7); a practice of universal benevolence would quickly exhaust all the resources of those who would attempt such.

The work of the church of Christ is not left to the evolving assumptions of men; it is *assigned*, not *assumed*. The arrangement God has given is sufficient to do all the things He wants done, in the spread of the gospel, in the building up of Christians, and in providing for the poor. As someone else has said, the problem is not that the plan does not work; the problem is, that we do not work the plan.

- by Pat Farish

"Nobody Knows!"

It is always a big mistake to imagine that your particular circumstances are unique. Others have probably experienced the same things - and probably to a greater degree. And, it is seldom true to say "nobody knows" in regards to your troubles, your burdens, your family relationships, etc. People likely do know, because they have been through the same issues - perhaps more often and more fully than you have. Furthermore, it is a good rule to avoid using superlatives - best, worst, most, least, etc. - to describe your own situation. More than likely, there are others whose condition exceeds your own.

The big problem with this kind of thinking is that it commonly leads to unhealthy excuse making. After all, since "nobody knows" what I am dealing with, they can not possibly understand how difficult it is for me. If they only knew, they would not criticize me, expect more of me, or correct me for my sins. "They just don't know!" --- Are you beginning to see how this flawed thinking leads to flawed living?

Here are the facts: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Observe:

a.. What you are dealing with is "common to man." Others have dealt with the same things you are dealing with and they DO know what it's like to have such problems, pains, pressures, etc. They have "been there, done that!"

b.. You CAN handle it. God promises that your issues will not be so great that you become overwhelmed, unable to resist, incapable of doing the right thing.

c.. There is a "way of escape." Look for it. Don't give in to the temptation. Resist it, and you will succeed (James 4:7).

- by Greg Gwin