

The Work of the Church – Evangelism

The Bible teaches that God designed and established the church (Matthew 16:18). He did not leave the church without purpose or direction. Instead, God gave the church a specific work to accomplish. That work can be described in three areas: evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

First, consider the church's work of evangelism. The world is lost in sin. Paul wrote, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). Yet God has provided the answer to man's greatest problem through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul declared that the gospel is *"the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16). Because the world needs to hear this saving message, Jesus commanded His followers, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15).

The church of the first century took this responsibility seriously. In Acts 13:1–3, the church at Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul out to preach the gospel. As Paul traveled and preached in other places, congregations provided financial support so that he could continue his work. Paul reminded the Corinthians, *"I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you"* (2 Corinthians 11:8). Likewise, the church at Philippi supported Paul's preaching work (Philippians 4:15–16).

Perhaps one of the greatest compliments ever given to a congregation was Paul's statement concerning the church at Thessalonica. He wrote, *"For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth"* (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The word of God was sounding forth from them into the surrounding world.

The same responsibility belongs to the church today. God has entrusted us with the greatest message the world has ever known. Therefore, a faithful congregation must always be concerned about spreading the gospel, both at home and throughout the world.

Evangelism is not simply one good work among many that the church may choose to do. It is part of the work God has given His church to accomplish.

- by Josh McCord

Positively No Visiting

Recently, while visiting patients in a hospital, we observed several signs saying, "No Visiting." Then we came to a sign that said, "Positively No Visiting." I suppose some day we will find one that will read, "Absolutely Positively No Visiting." If only we could learn to respect authority so that "No Visiting" would just mean no visiting.

The attitude of many toward the Lord's authority is the same as it is toward a "No Visiting" sign. They somehow feel that they are an exception to the rule or that somehow the Lord will overlook this one instance of flouting His authority. But the same God who would not overlook Nadab and Abihu's strange fire (Leviticus 10:1-2), David's new cart (2 Samuel 6:1-7), or Ananias and Sapphira's cover-up tactics, will not overlook our disregard for His authority.

The words "positively" and "absolutely" are not found in the King James Version of the Bible. But they are inferred in every statement and command found in the scriptures. One cannot hope to go to heaven while disregarding Christ's authority.

- by Bill Hall

When 'Agreement' Becomes the Standard

We often hear this statement today: "Let's focus on the things we agree on and not the things where we disagree." That sounds good. We all want peace and unity. But is this really the Bible's plan for religious unity?

Think about where this approach leads. Suppose one person believes baptism is necessary for salvation and another does not. They agree that Jesus is the Son of God, that the Bible is

God's Word, and that Christians should live good lives. So, should they simply ignore their disagreement about baptism?

What if someone denies the resurrection? What if he teaches that Christ is not divine? What if he accepts some form of immorality that the Bible clearly condemns? Even with all these issues, there will still be many things on which we agree.

If we make agreement our standard for fellowship, where do we draw the line? The truth is, this philosophy opens the door to almost every kind of religious error. With this view we can always find enough things on which to agree and, therefore, we can justify fellowship with practically anyone.

But the Bible never tells us to measure truth by how much we have in common. Jesus prayed that His followers would be one, but He said, "Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Biblical unity is based upon truth, not upon ignoring differences.

Paul warned Christians about those who teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). He told the Galatians that even if an angel preached another gospel, it was to be rejected (Gal. 1:8-9). John taught that those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ are not to be received (2 John 9-11). These passages would make little sense if our responsibility were simply to concentrate on the things we agree about.

Of course, we should not be contentious over matters of opinion. We should be patient, kind and loving toward one another. But love does not justify the compromise of truth. In fact, genuine love demands that we care about the truth because error can cost a person his soul.

We need to remember that unity is not the highest standard - truth is. Our goal should not be unity at any cost. Our goal should be unity based upon the Word of God. So, the question is not, *"How much do we agree on?"* The question is, "What has God said?" When God has spoken, our responsibility is not to downplay doctrinal differences. Our responsibility is to believe what His Word says, teach it and obey it.

- by Greg Gwin