

The Work of the Church – Edification

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 generally be described in three areas: evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

Let's consider the church's work of edification. The word edification carries the idea of building up or strengthening. God intends for the church to grow and develop spiritually. Paul described the body of Christ as working together for the "edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16). In fact, God provided various offices and functions within the church for the purpose of "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–12).

God has given us everything necessary to accomplish this work. The Holy Spirit revealed the truth through the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5). Preachers are charged with proclaiming that truth (2 Timothy 4:2), and elders are responsible for overseeing the flock and protecting it from false teaching (Acts 20:28–32). When the truth is faithfully taught, received, and obeyed, the church will be built up spiritually.

Unfortunately, many have attempted to add to God's plan for edification by involving the church in dinners, plays, recreation, entertainment, and other social activities. While individual Christians may certainly enjoy wholesome activities together, these things are not the means God gave the church for spiritual edification. God's plan is both simple and effective. God's word "is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Edification is also an important purpose of our assemblies. Paul instructed the Corinthians, "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26). When Christians assemble to worship God, we are not only honoring Him, we are also strengthening and encouraging one another. Our singing accomplishes this purpose as we are "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16). Prayer strengthens and encourages the church (1 Corinthians 14:15–17). Even as we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are reminded together of the sacrifice of Christ and proclaim His death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

God knew exactly what His church needed to grow stronger. We need the Word of God taught, believed, obeyed, and lived.

- by Josh McCord

Trouble on the Farm and in the Church

When I was quite young I learned some important lessons regarding farm work. Mules were my favorite beast of burden (those were the days when there were very few tractors on Missouri farms). But I immediately learned to regard with much awe the hind feet of a mule. Yet the lesson I learned was that -- a mule can't pull while kicking -- and he can't kick while pulling.

Even now, when the mule is almost extinct on the farms, we can learn a lesson in the church from him. In some places brethren fuss and 'kick' so much that they just can't get down to pulling the load of spiritual service to the Lord. But if they can be induced to get busy pulling, they will almost always give up their kicking. Perhaps preachers should be the first to be impressed with the principle we learned from the good ole mule.

- by Leslie Diestelkamp

Grace Won't Cover That

We often hear about the wonderful grace of God - and rightly so. We are saved by God's grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and none of us could be saved without it. But there is a danger in misunderstanding grace. Some seem to think that God's grace will cover anything, even when we knowingly refuse to do what God commands.

There are two areas where we may mistakenly think grace will cover us:

- First, I know something is wrong, but I continue doing it anyway. Perhaps I know that a particular practice is sinful, but I have no intention of giving it up. I may tell myself, "God knows my heart. His grace will cover me." Paul dealt with exactly this attitude: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Romans 6:1-2). Grace is not a license to deliberately continue in sin.
- Second, I know something is right, but I refuse to do it. Sin is not limited to doing what God forbids. James plainly says, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). If I know I should be doing something God requires, but deliberately refuse to do it, I cannot simply assume that grace will overlook my disobedience.

In both cases, the problem is the same: there has been no repentance. Whether I am doing what I know is wrong or failing to do what I know is right, continuing in that condition while expecting grace to excuse me is a serious misunderstanding of God's grace. Jesus' warning could not be clearer: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

God's grace is truly amazing. It offers forgiveness to those who turn from sin and seek to obey Him. But grace does not give us permission to knowingly remain in sin. Let us never use God's grace as an excuse for disobedience. Instead, let us appreciate its greatness by responding to it with humble repentance and faithful obedience.

- by Greg Gwin

t