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**THE WORK
OF THE CHURCH**



GEORGE T. JONES

THE WORK
OF THE CHURCH

GEORGE J. LOMES

The Work of the Church

The study tonight is the work of the Church. The work the church does identifies and distinguishes it. It will come to be known in the world by the work it does. For instance, civic clubs and lodges come to have whatever reputation they possess by the nature of the work they do. Furthermore, the work of the church is mightily involved in its purity. This is true because God's Divine Spirit has revealed to us the work the church is to do. It is a well-known fact that to change the worship God's Spirit has revealed for the church, is to desecrate the church. In like manner to change the work God has revealed for the church to do, is to pervert God's revelation.

In the beginning, there are some terms I want to define. The first of these is the "church." The word occurs in the New Testament one hundred and ten times. Eighteen of these are references to the church in the universal sense. An example of this is Matthew 16:18: "Upon this rock I will build my church." Ninety-two times the word church is used in the New Testament to signify the local congregation. An instance of this is 1 Corinthians 1:2: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth." Now be it understood in the study of the work of the church that it is not the work of the church universal. God did not authorize any machinery by which the church universal could function. The church in the aggregate has no organization. Hence, the work of the church in the New Testament sense pertains to the work of the local church. An example of this is found in Acts 11. A church had been established in Antioch of Syria. While this work was still new, the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas there to preach. Verse 22 reads: "And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: And they sent forth Barnabas as far as Antioch." In this way

did the church at Jerusalem work. The New Testament is completely silent in regard to any kind of operation of the church universal. One will search the scriptures completely in vain for such an arrangement.

Those who conceived the Missionary Society did so with a view to providing machinery for the church in its universal sense to function. Typical of this thinking is the statement of W. K. Pendleton, son-in-law of Alexander Campbell, and ardent exponent of the Missionary Society. Pendleton said: "We fear that the large conception of the church universal is too little realized by many Christians of the present day. Their ideas of the church and of the responsibilities and work of the church, circle too much within the limits of the local congregation." This he said by way of advocating the Missionary Society. All that the New Testament says "of the responsibilities and work of the church" circles entirely within the limits of the local congregation!

The other term involved in this study is "work." This simply means that which the Lord authorized the church to do. The Lord gave the church certain work. He did not establish it and leave her to do work of her own devising. He has authorized the work of the church.

Two questions will be involved in this study:

1. What is the work of the church?
2. How is the work to be done?

Work To Be Done By the Church

The church is to engage in the work of self-edification. It is to build up and strengthen the faith of the members. In delivering the commission, according to Matthew Jesus said: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." (Matt. 28:20.) This refers to those who have been baptized. When a person

is baptized into Christ and thereby is a member of the church, he is not already in heaven or in possession of eternal life. He must persevere in faithfulness. This must be taught to all members of the church. Children of God must be taught to "walk in him, rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith. (Col. 2:6,7.) As Christians we must "long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation." (1 Peter 2:2.) Many members of the body of Christ do not grow except chronologically. (Heb. 5:12-14.)

That it is the business of the church to encourage, stimulate and produce such growth admits of no doubt. To the elders of the church at Ephesus Paul said: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28.) The elders are charged to feed the church! What are they to feed them? In verse 32 of this chapter Paul declared to these same elders: "And now I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." The church needs to be built up. The word of God will edify or build up. The elders of the local church are charged to feed the flock the word to build them up. Therefore, it is the work of the church to edify its members.

Second, the church is to preach the gospel to the lost. Someone has said: "It is the work of the church to gather and scatter . . . to gather the saved and scatter the word." There are examples in the New Testament of churches engaging in such work. Thessalonica had sounded forth the word in Macedonia, Achaia and elsewhere. (1 Thess. 1:8.) Philippi had fellowshipped Paul in preaching the gospel. (Phil. 1:5.) Jerusalem, as we have already seen, sent

a gospel preacher to Antioch. (Acts 11:22.)

Indisputably, it is the work of the church to preach the gospel to the unsaved. Every congregation should be engaged in it to the fullest extent of her ability and resources. No church should be willing to do less than all she is able to do in evangelizing.

The church is also to engage in the work of ministering to the poor. That this is one of the God-ordained works of the church is not to be denied. Personally, I have never known any Christian to deny it, preacher or otherwise!

Benevolence Not Primary Work of Church

Recently there came to my possession some material in which the author was lamenting the disproportionate amount the churches were spending for evangelism as compared with their expenditure for benevolence. This preacher thought a more complete restoration of primitive Christianity would tend to equalize the expenditure for benevolence with evangelism. But, is this true? The New Testament teaches benevolence was a secondary work, not the primary. In Luke 10:38-42, we read these words: "And a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving; and she came up to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. But the Lord answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Here was Jesus in the house of these friends, a place to which He delighted to go. One sister sits at His feet receiving His teaching. The other is

busily engaged in ministering to His physical wants. The one thus engaged, Martha, comes to Christ to have Him upbraid her sister for sitting and not helping to care for His needs. Instead, Jesus replies to her: "Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary hath chosen the good part." Instead of rebuking Mary for sitting at His feet, He rebukes Martha. Jesus gives her to understand that to sit at His feet and receive His teaching is a more important consideration than ministering even to our Lord's own physical needs!

Again, in the sixth chapter of Acts there is a record of the church at Jerusalem taking care of its needy. Previously, this has been alluded to by Luke in Acts 4:34,35. At this time there were some Grecian widows in the church who were being neglected in the daily distribution of these physical supplies. A protest was made to the apostles and they called the disciples together and said: "It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables. Look ye out, therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." (Acts 6:2,3.) What did the apostles say? Which is more important and which should take precedence in the church, feeding the hungry or preaching the gospel? My dear brethren, the answer of the apostles is: "It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God and serve tables." They charged the disciples to put certain ones over this secondary work and they would continue in the ministry of the word!

Furthermore, it would be foolish for us to assume that cities like Corinth, Philippi, etc., did not have their slums and their poverty-ridden masses in apostolic times. It is inconceivable, for instance, that Corinth with a population of six-hundred thousand people had no poor and indigent people. But Paul and his apostolic co-laborers went

into these cities with their rich and with their poor, with their down-trodden and with their elevated. What does the New Testament reveal that these preachers did? They did **not** establish huge benevolent programs; even to feed and clothe the people so they could preach to them. This did not happen! Instead, they preached to them the gospel of Christ. They told them the way of salvation.

Church Limited In Benevolent Work To Its Own

Widows are not to be "enrolled" to become the burden of the church unless they are widows indeed. "But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplication and prayers night and day." (1 Tim. 5:4,5.) Thus, it is clearly seen that the church is not to support all widows.

If a sister is a widow and has children or other relatives, they are to support her. Paul did not say these children or relatives are to support her if **convenient**. He said they are to support her. Furthermore, he wrote: "If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." (1 Tim. 5:16.)

The Jerusalem church practiced benevolence among its own members. Acts 4:34,35 reads: "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." It is clear from this passage that this distribution was for the needy "among

them"; that is, among the saints. In Acts 6:1, we read: "And in those days, the number of disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily ministration." In this instance of benevolence, it is clear that the church was taking care of its own. As a matter of fact, the occasion mentioned in Acts 6:1 is but a continuation of what is alluded to in Acts 4:34,35.

Another instance of the church doing benevolent work is found in Acts 11:29,30. Prophets had come to Antioch from Jerusalem and foretold a famine of intense severity that was to come "over all the world." When the brethren in Antioch heard of this the result was: "And the disciples every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea." (Acts 11:29.) Note the fact that the relief sent by the Antioch church was "unto the brethren."

Similarly, the churches of Macedonia and Achaia made a contribution to the saints at Jerusalem. "I go unto Jerusalem, ministering unto the saints. For it hath been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints that are at Jerusalem." (Rom. 15:25,26.) Furthermore, it is quite clear that church treasuries were used for this work. It was concerning this same case of benevolence Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16:1,2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." The eighth and ninth chapters of Second Corinthians are also devoted to this same collection for the Jerusalem saints. In these Paul was stirring up the brethren at Corinth to send to the aid of the church in Jerusalem.

I have read every occurrence recorded on the pages of the New Testament of the church engaging in benevolent work. This is a complete account of the instances in the New Testament in which the church engaged in ministering to the poor. Without exception the poor ministered to was the **poor saints**. There is no record that the church ever used its treasury to care for those who were not members of the church. In addition to this I give a quotation from Mosheim's Historical Commentaries on the State of Christianity. Mosheim was a learned German church historian. This work of his was produced around the middle of the 18th century. This quotation is from Vidal's translation from the original Latin, published in 1813. "In the next place, we find it laid down in clear and express terms, as the duty of every Christian family to provide, as far as they were able, for those of their own kindred, and not suffer them to become a burden to the church. (1 Tim. 5:3,16.) By another apostolic admonition, particular care is enjoined to be taken that evil-disposed persons might not be furnished, through the bounty of the church, with the means for vicious gratification. And lastly, in addition to all this, it is still further directed that the number of those to whom public relief was granted, should not be suffered to increase beyond measure, or so as to press too hard on the means of those by whom such relief was supplied. It was not, therefore, every one who might happen to be destitute, or in need, that was regarded by the primitive church in the light of a pauper, meriting charitable assistance. To entitle a man to public relief amongst the first Christians, it was necessary that he should appear to be duly impressed with a proper sense of his duty towards God and mankind; and that he should not either be capable of procuring a subsistence for himself by any exertions of his own, or have any relatives or con-

nections to whom he might with any degree of justice or propriety be referred for assistance adequate to his wants." (Vol. I, P. 183.) Thus, it has been established, both from the New Testament and from history, that the benevolent work of the church was confined to its own.

Church Cannot Do Benevolent Work Through Institutional Board

Another very vital consideration in a study of the benevolent work of the church is that the church cannot do its benevolent work through an institutional board. I do not believe it is scriptural or right for the church to fulfill her charitable obligations through an institutional board. Why? Because there is no authority in the scriptures for the church to do such work through an institution! Seventy-five years ago conservative brethren within the ranks of the Restoration Movement learned the church could not do its evangelistic work through a missionary society. The issue was discussed at length and the conclusions reached, on the basis of scripture teaching, that the church was all-sufficient to do evangelistic work. There was no authority in God's Word for the missionary society, through which the church could do its preaching to the lost! My brethren, this was the only thing wrong with such an institution. It exists without Divine authority. The only thing wrong with instrumental music is there is no authority for it in the New Testament. The same principle makes it wrong for the church to minister to the poor through a benevolent institution. God's wisdom, which made the church adequate for preaching the gospel **without** a missionary society, also made her adequate to do her charitable work **without** a benevolent board.

There is a vast difference between the church contributing to any kind of an institution and in buying the services of said institutions. For instance, if the church

here had an indigent member who needed hospitalization, it could send that member to the hospital and the church could pay his hospital bill. The church would not be contributing to the hospital (an institution); but, simply buying its services to care for a needy member. In caring for its needy, the church might buy the services of any number of organizations or institutions such as grocery stores, hospitals, orphan homes, etc. But this is far removed from the situation in which a benevolent institution seeks to get support from every church treasury in the land. Another thing, when the church sends a poor member to the hospital for treatment and pays the bill, the church maintains responsibility for the person. This is also far removed from the situation of unfortunate persons being turned over to an institution for the said institution to have the responsibility of them.

Not A Question of Methods

Someone asks if the orphan's home or other benevolent institution is not merely a method of the church doing its work. The idea being, that God has not specified the method or methods the church might use in doing her benevolent work any more than He has specified methods of doing her evangelistic work. None of whom I know is contending God has specified every method or means. The simple truth is the benevolent institution is not a means of the church doing her work, but an organization for which there is no authority. To illustrate this, the Red Cross is not a method of caring for flood or tornado victims. The Red Cross is an organization that collects funds. These funds must be used to procure the same means or methods any other organization would use for the relief of those stricken by disaster. Likewise, the March of Dimes is not a method or way of treating poliomyelitis. The March of Dimes is an organization collecting money.

With this money it must buy the same means or methods any other organization would use to treat those stricken by this crippler. In like manner, the benevolent institution is not a way or method of doing benevolent work. As an institution, it collects money (a considerable portion from churches), with this money it provides the same ways, methods, means, etc. of caring for the needy that the church would use. Just so it was with the missionary society. It collected funds from the churches and used these funds to secure the same methods of preaching that the church would use. It was not a method of preaching but an organization preaching.

Individual Benevolence

Many people fail to see the difference between what the church does and what the individual Christian does. The New Testament makes a distinction. Some people look at an individual and see the church! But the difference is plain. In Ephesians 6:4, Paul wrote: "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." My brethren, this does not describe a work of the church, but of individual Christians. God has given the responsibility to Christian parents to bring their children up in the fear of the Lord. If, as a Christian parent, I spank and otherwise discipline my children, is it the work of the church? Certainly not. It is a work God never gave to the church.

Again, Paul wrote: "Wives be in subjection to your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Also, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church." (Eph. 5:22,25.) If a husband loves his wife, do you think this is the working of the church? If a wife is in subjection to her own husband, do you think this is the functioning of the church? Surely, it is clear to every thinking person that there is a difference between what the church

does and what the individual does. There is a difference between one member of my body and my whole body. My arm is not my whole body. There is a difference between one brick of a building and the whole building.

A portion of the New Testament's teaching on ministering to the poor is addressed to the individual Christian, not the church. One of the very simplest rules of Bible study we have always insisted upon is to determine to whom a passage is addressed. This rule certainly needs to apply in this case. Is the statement addressed to the church or to the individual Christian? Let us see. In James 1:26,27, there is this reading: "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Can any honest student of this passage fail to see that it is addressed to the individual? James says, "If any man thinketh himself"; and, "while he bridleth not his own tongue . . . this man's religion is vain." In contrast with a man's religion being vain who bridles not his tongue in verse 26, he declares that true religion (the opposite of a man's vain religion) is to "visit the fatherless and widows and keep oneself unspotted from the world." Can this be any but individual responsibility? Can it be addressed to any except the individual Christian? Not if language has meaning!

Another passage to which this simple rule of Bible study needs to be applied is Galatians 6:10. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith." To whom is this language written? To the church or to individuals? In verse 6 Paul admonishes "him" who is taught to com-

municate to him that teaches. In verses 7 and 8 he warns against deceiving ourselves, sowing to the flesh, mocking God, and the fruits of this. In verse 9, he admonishes us not to become weary in serving. And in verse 10, as the opportunity arises, to do good to all. There is nothing in the entire context to suggest Paul was teaching what the work of the church is.

Hence, it is a misapplication of James 1:27 and Galatians 6:10 to cite them in support of brotherhood benevolent programs and institutions. In the first place, such an application is to array these passages against 1 Timothy 5 which limits and restricts the beneficence of the church to certain of its own members. In the second place, it is to make these passages say what was not intended.

Some Things Not Work of Church

The church is not to support other institutions. God has made it all-sufficient. He has never given it the work of supporting other institutions. Nor is the church engaged in secular education. Individual members of the church have an interest in this kind of education. Private schools operated by Christians and emphasizing Bible teaching in addition to other branches of learning are worthy of the support of individual Christians, but cannot be scripturally supported by churches. God simply never gave such work to churches.

Social activity, recreation and entertainment do not constitute a part of the work of the church. It is not recorded in the New Testament that the Lord ever gave such functions to His church. The social life of the members is something God did not tell the church to engage in. Social activity does not come under the heading of edification, preaching the gospel to the lost or benevolence. Many churches are setting a trend in this direction. They are making it the business of the church to provide recreational facilities for the

young people. They are also providing kitchens and dining rooms for old and young to eat together and carry on what is called "Christian fellowship." One who has read the New Testament a little should know God never gave the church to engage in such activity. It is to preach the gospel, edify its members and care for its needy.

How Churches Cooperated

That New Testament churches cooperated in the first century and that they may cooperate now has not been denied. The New Testament reveals they did cooperate and how they cooperated. In Acts 11:29,30 there is an example of church cooperation. Prophets had come to Antioch from Jerusalem and foretold a famine. The brethren of Antioch were stirred by this prophecy and acted accordingly. "And the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea: which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul." What actually happened here? The liberality of the Antioch disciples manifested itself in sending a contribution for "the brethren that dwelt in Judea." To whom did they send it? "To the elders." Were these the elders of the churches in Judea, where the brethren lived for whom the relief was sent; or, were they the elders of some church that had set itself up as the "Sponsoring Church for Judean Relief"? It would be hard to conceive of a more fanciful interpretation of this passage than the one which says the elders were the Jerusalem elders and that the Jerusalem church took the oversight of distribution of this relief. The fact is that the Antioch brethren "determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea: which also they did."

Another case in which churches cooperated was for the relief of the needy in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25,26). The churches sending to Jerusalem were the churches of

Macedonia, Galatia and Corinth (I Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 8:1,2; 9:1,2). What was the pattern of operation in this sending? The foregoing passages show conclusively that Jerusalem was to be the recipient of this bounty. The Divine record also shows these churches to have sent their contributions to Jerusalem directly by the "messengers of the churches." In 2 Cor. 8:18-21, we have this: "And we have sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches; and not only so, but who was also appointed by the churches to travel with us in the matter of this grace, which is ministered by us to the glory of the Lord avoiding this, that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us." Paul was relating the arrangement by which the bounty of the several churches was to be sent to Jerusalem. He declares there were certain brethren who had been "appointed by the churches to travel with us in the matter of this grace." These were the "messengers of the churches." Paul was one of them and he declared that he was going to Jerusalem ministering to the saints (Rom. 15:25). Twice in verses 19,20, he declares this bounty was "ministered by us"; that is, the messengers of the churches. Thus, again churches cooperated without a centralized, sponsoring church. Jerusalem had the need and the contributions were sent by the contributing churches to the one in need.

The church at Philippi contributed to Paul's support in preaching by sending directly to him (Phil. 4:15,16). Other churches contributed to his support when he preached at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8,9). A most excellent comment on these passages is found in the **Gospel Advocate Teacher's Annual Lesson Commentary** for 1946, p. 341. "There was no 'missionary society' in evidence, and none was needed; the

brethren simply raised the money and sent it directly to Paul. This is the way it should be done today. No organization is needed to accomplish the work the Lord has authorized the church to do. When men become dissatisfied with God's arrangement and set up one of their own, they have already crossed the threshold to apostasy. Let us be satisfied with the Lord's manner of doing things." (Emphasis mine, GTJ)

What is the pattern of cooperation by churches set forth in the foregoing? In the first instance, one church sent to alleviate the needs of several churches. Second, several churches sent to one church in need. Third, one church sent directly to a preacher to sustain him. Fourth, a number of churches sent directly to a preacher to support him in preaching. There is one clearly defined pattern in all of these: **no sponsoring church!** Never in the New Testament did a church assume the responsibility of a work too great for it to carry on, a work to which other churches sustained an equal relationship; and, then go to the other churches and say, "Send us of your money to carry on this work." Such is not in the New Testament. The matter of church cooperation is like all other Bible themes: all we know about it is found in the Word. Since the New Testament reveals that churches did cooperate and that they cooperated by sending directly to churches in need and directly to preachers in the field, this is the revealed pattern of church cooperation.

In 2 Cor. 8:13,14, Paul has penned some highly significant words relative to the purpose of churches sending to another church. He was writing to the church at Corinth urging them to send to Jerusalem to alleviate the needs of the saints there. "For I say not this that others may be eased and ye distressed: but by equality: your abundance being a supply at this present time for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for

your want; that there may be equality." Paul specifically says he does not urge Corinth to give to Jerusalem to cause Corinth to be distressed and Jerusalem put at ease. But, he does urge them to send to promote equality: "your abundance being a supply at this present time for their want." We have Paul's word for it that Corinth had "abundance" and Jerusalem was in "want." Corinth, having abundance, was urged to contribute to Jerusalem's want. Paul said do this "that there may be equality." Hence, when New Testament churches were urged to contribute to another church, it was not a case of weak churches being called upon to help strong churches do some "great" work. It was a case of churches having abundance sending to those in need "that there may be equality."

In Conclusion

The church is not faced with the choice of failing to do the work God has given her to do; or, of using unscriptural institutions to do the work. If one believes in the Omniscience of God, he can accept the truth that God gave the church in the first century adequate machinery with which to function in the twentieth century. This problem can never be settled until brethren recognize the church can do all the work God wants it to do. The difficulty will be resolved to the extent brethren are willing to take New Testament authority. It reveals God's organization for the church and what it is His will for the church to do.

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