

The Work of the Church

Introduction

Acts 11:21-26

1. **Most people recognize some sort of distinction between the “individual” and “collective” responsibilities of the Christian.**
2. **In this lesson, we want to concentrate on the “collective” part of Christianity — that is, the work that God expects local congregations to engage in as the “together” part of our duties.**
3. **Serious disagreements exist over this subject. It is important to:**
 - A. **Have the right attitude**

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- B. **Handle the Scriptures carefully**
2 Timothy 2:15

4. **In this and all other studies, we will want to keep clear what is taught in God’s word concerning:**
 - A. **The Lordship of Christ.**

1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

- B. **The authority of the Scriptures**
2 Timothy 3:16-17

What Do We Mean “The Work of the Church”?

1. Consider the distinction between the **universal** and the **local** church.

A. The word “church” is sometimes used **universally** to refer to all Christians everywhere.

Matthew 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

B. But “church” is also used **locally** to refer to Christians in a given locality who commit themselves to work and worship together.

Romans 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

2. Consider also the distinction between **individual**, **concurrent**, and **collective** action.

A. **Individual** activity is simply what the individual Christian does independently as a saint.

B. **Concurrent** activity occurs when two or more people happen to be doing the same thing, but without any intent to act jointly or in an organized fashion.

- C. **Collective** activity occurs when people act with the intent to function as a unit or group.
- 1) This is the type of action in view when we talk of the “work of the church.”
 - 2) There is no scriptural authority for any group larger than the local church to engage in this kind of work. **In the New Testament, the local church is always the realm of collective action.**
3. As with collective work in any realm, the collective action of the local church is characterized by:
- A. A common **function**.
 - B. A common **oversight**.
 - C. A common **treasury**.
4. A congregation’s overseers are not to oversee and its treasury is not to pay for anything that is not properly its function!
5. Whatever may be the scope of **individual** Christian good works, the Lord has directed the **local church** to engage in a very specific range of activities. **Its work is not merely anything we decide is a good work!**

The Spiritual Purpose of the Local Church

1. The local church exists for the spiritual purpose of **making** and **developing** disciples of Christ.
Ephesians 4:11-16
 - A. This involves two basic works:
 - 1) **Evangelism**
Acts 11:21-26
Philippians 1:3-5
 - 2) **Edification**
Acts 15:36-41
 - B. In the New Testament, we find congregations engaging in only one other collective action, and that is **benevolent help for needy Christians**.
Acts 4:34-37
1 Corinthians 16:1-4
 - 1) But even this scriptural activity was limited and kept secondary to evangelism and edification.
Acts 6:1-7
2. The **nature** of the church is spiritual, and its **work** is spiritual. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).
3. We need to take seriously the fact that the Lord has assigned the local church a specific mission and work. We do not have God’s authorization to go beyond His instructions.

Going Beyond the Scriptural Work of the Church

1. **Many today do go beyond the work of the church in the New Testament. Some examples:**
 - A. **Social activities, recreation, entertainment, etc.**
 - B. **General benevolent assistance to the public, community “good works,” etc.**
 - C. **Educational activities, schools, daycare centers, etc.**
2. **However good these kinds of works may be on the individual level, the Lord has limited the work of the local church.**
 - A. **It is simply not true that “the church can do anything the individual can do.”**
 - 1) **On this point, let’s compare the following passages:**

Galatians 6:9-10 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. **(10)** Therefore, as **we** have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

1 Timothy 5:16 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 who are really widows.

3. **Those who profess no allegiance to scriptural authority might be expected to follow their own judgment.**
 - A. **It is sad when those who do so are those who say they wish to be **simply New Testament Christians.****

God's Word must Be Our Authority

- 1. God's word must be our source of authority for the work of the church, just as it is for our individual work**
2 Timothy 3:16-17

- 2. The Scriptures warn against being dissatisfied with "sound doctrine."**
2 Timothy 4:2-4
 - A. In the place of scripturally authorized work, are we to substitute:**
 - 1) Human wisdom?**
 - 2) Our own preferences?**
 - 3) What "others" are doing?**
 - 4) That which seems "successful"?**

- 3. We dare not go beyond the teaching of Christ.**

2 John 9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

Conclusion

- 1. It is not our prerogative to define the work that the Lord's church is to do — that right belongs to the Lord Himself.**

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

- 2. If we will limit ourselves to the work the Lord has assigned the local congregation to do, we will do a better job of that work.**
- 3. We must reject anything *not* authorized as the work of the church — and we must actively engage in all that is involved in that work!**

