

THE WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Text: Ephesians 4:11-16

INTRO: The church of Jesus Christ began in 30 AD on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection. From then till near the end of the first century, it was guided by inspired apostles & prophets. There can be no doubt that the N.T. written by these inspired apostles & prophets tells us what the N.T. church should be and do. Since the N.T. Scriptures recognize no working unit larger than or smaller than or other than the local congregation to do the work God gave the church to do, we want to look at the nature of the work God has assigned to local churches. We make no apology for believing that the N.T. Scriptures supply a pattern by which congregations can be established and maintained.

According to the N.T. pattern, the work of local churches may be divided into 3 realms--evangelism, edification & relief of needy saints.

I. LOCAL CHURCHES HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE FOR THE TEACHING OF THE GOSPEL TO THE LOST.

A. The unit of work in the local church is the whole congregation. The whole church cannot evangelize in unison, but the church can & should provide for that work to be done.

1. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to preach the gospel, Acts 11:22-24.
2. The church in Antioch, in response to the direct command of the H.S., sent Barnabas & Paul to preach the gospel throughout a great portion of the Roman Empire, Acts 13:1ff.
3. Paul commended brethren in Thessalonica: For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia & Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. (1 Thess. 1:8).

B. Thus, local churches have the right--and even more-- the

responsibility to sound out the gospel to the extent of their ability, & this they do by providing preachers, Bibles, whatever is a legitimate aid to teaching God's will to a lost & dying world.

II. LOCAL CHURCHES HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVIDING FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY CHRISTIANS.

From whom the body, joined & knit together by what every joint supplies; according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:16).

A. A major factor in accomplishing this worthy purpose is the public worship service. Too often, perhaps, we think of the worship service as an end within itself. Not so! It is a means to an end. Preaching, praying, studying, singing, commemorating Christ's death--these are a means by which the local church obeys the command to edify itself in love.

1. The church should provide whatever is necessary & expedient in accomplishing this purpose--an assembly hall, class rooms, hymnals, blackboards, study materials... even conveniences within reason: pews, heaters, air conditioners, rest rooms, water coolers, etc. 1 Cor 14:23.

2. Included in this realm is financial support of preachers and/or elders, others as situations may deem wise, 1 Tim 5:18. Such support may include housing, utilities, travel expenses --anything that might be considered a legitimate living expense.

B. Another factor in edification is that of church discipline that is sometimes needed for proper balanced growth of the body of Christ. READ I CORINTHIANS 5:4-5.

III. THE THIRD & FINAL AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IS THAT OF PROVIDING FOR THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF DESTITUTE SAINTS.

READ ACTS 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 11:29; 1 COR 16:1-4

A. This responsibility is not a primary function of the church as are its other 2 responsibilities. The church does not exist for the purpose of providing physical relief. It exists for the purpose of teaching the gospel to the lost & edifying the saints.

B. But assisting needy saints is a Scriptural work of the church, growing out of the nature of the relationship that exists within the church itself.

READ I TIMOTHY 5:4, 8, 16

NOTE: Just as a married man has certain responsibilities to his wife, & a government has certain responsibilities to its citizens, so also the church has responsibilities to its faithful members in certain emergency situations.

C. This provision may include housing, utilities, food, health care, any & every legitimate expense of maintaining a reasonably comfortable life.

CONCLUSION: Before closing this lesson, we might briefly call attention to the fact that the church has no responsibility whatsoever to provide recreation & entertainment for able bodied church members, or for the world at large. The church has no responsibility for entering the realm of politics, general welfare, the business world, etc.

Let us close by once again reading EPHESIANS 4:11-16.

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