

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Work of a church of Christ

A local church of Christ is composed of saints. In a mature church, some of these saints are bishops, and some are deacons, Philippians 1:1. The organization implied in these words indicates that a local church of Christ is to work, collectively. Each member of this church will have “good works” he/she is personally to perform; but there is work to be done by the church, the “collective”, and this is the purpose of the organization.

Our consideration of the work that a church of Christ properly does will be drawn from precepts announced, and the description of the things churches did, in the New Testament. Some sneer at this, deriding the idea that the behavior of people two thousand years ago in a cultural situation far removed from ours should be any kind of guide for us. The problem with these folk is that they do not understand that it is not the behavior of those brethren in the first century that fascinates us, but the direction from God that promoted such behavior. If someone finds such a response to Scripture to be too restrictive, so be it. It is the response God prescribed. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they should “learn

by us not to go beyond what is written ..." (I Corinthians 4:6); and so must we all.

A church of Christ works to spread the gospel.

Such a mission, the burden of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), was embraced by local churches. Barnabas and Saul were sent on their first preaching tour by the church at Antioch, at the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). As he later worked in preaching the gospel Paul was assisted by the church at Philippi, with whom he had "partnership in the gospel from the first day unto now" (Philippians 1:5). He further says to them, "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again" (4:15, 16). With this kind of concern for the spread of the gospel, we are not surprised that before the pen of inspiration is laid down for the last time we read of the gospel being preached "everywhere" (Mark 16:20). Paul writes of "the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven ..." (Colossians 1:23). The gospel, the power of God to save, is the most precious message the world can know: and a church of Christ has no higher aim than to be preaching that gospel in every way possible.

A church of Christ seeks to edify.

One who becomes a Christian is likened to a newborn (John 3:3-7; I Peter 1:23; I Corinthians 3:1). As delightful as a baby is, we

nonetheless expect to see it grow and develop, and anxiously watch for physical advance. By the same token, the babe in Christ is expected to put aside spiritual dependence in the process of maturing. Because some had not, the writer of Hebrews said, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil” (5:12-14).

The Lord expects that, after a reasonable time, “we may no longer be children”. So He made provision for the local church to edify, to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ...” (Ephesians 4:12-15).

So, the local church provides opportunities of Bible study, and more formal gatherings for worship, as well as spiritual oversight in those situations where qualified men serve as elders. As far as its members are concerned, edification is the most important activity a church can pursue.

A church of Christ works in benevolence.

A Christian is moved by the plight of the needy, and as he has opportunity and ability he tries to alleviate that need. However, Scripture indicates that churches' benevolent assistance should be given to "the saints" (Romans 15:26; I Corinthians 16:2, et al). The apostles said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (Acts 6:2). Things pertaining to the eternal are more important than things that pertain to the temporal. Jesus said, "For you always have the poor with you" (Mark 14:7); a practice of universal benevolence would quickly exhaust all the resources of those who would attempt such.

The work of the church of Christ is not left to the evolving assumptions of men; it is *assigned*, not *assumed*. The arrangement God has given is sufficient to do all the things He wants done, in the spread of the gospel, in the building up of Christians, and in providing for the poor. As someone else has said, the problem is not that the plan does not work; the problem is, that we do not work the plan.

- Pat Farish

You Owe Me!

"I Paul...say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides" (Philemon 19). I am amazed. How bold for a preacher to say "You owe me." Yet he told the truth. I seem somehow to hear

my teachers echoing the words. They have the right to demand ("enjoin" v.8) payment, but alas, how shall I pay them?

I can pay in material goods. Paul obviously expected a consideration in regard to Onesimus' material debt now on Paul's account (v.19) and he asks for lodging (v.22). Paul claimed right to "eat and drink," to "lead about a wife," and to "forbear working" (1 Cor. 9:5, 6). Such rights depended upon his basic right to expect his converts to support him — he who plants eats the fruit (v.7). He sowed the spiritual; he should reap their material (v. 11). Paul did not demand payment, but they still owed him (v.18). And that is a long way from "employing" Paul! Likewise, the Philippians "from the first day" accepted their obligation and were Paul's partners in the gospel (Phil. 1:5-7). By "giving and receiving," the partnership worked and they honored their debt "sending once and again to Paul's necessity (4:15, 16).

I can become the teacher's helper. Paul expected such from Philemon — "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself" (Philemon 17). This kind of payment is suggested in the debt statement — "thou owest... thine own self" (v.19). Payment on such a debt is made by giving of self — by service. It is giving time and work to the teacher. Paul marks payment to Philemon for the vicarious service of Onesimus who "in thy stead...ministered unto me" (v.13) and was "profitable" (v.11). Epaphroditus on behalf of the Philippians ministered to Paul. Paul said, "...he ministered to my wants.... to supply your lack of service toward me" (Phil. 2:25, 30).

I can use my abilities to advance my teacher's cause. "Let him that is taught in the word (the debtor) communicate (join as a partner) unto him that teacheth in all good things (the spiritual cause - Gal. 6:6). I repay my teacher by zealously serving the same cause he serves.

I can manifest a loyal attitude to the truth taught. As when I first "received the word with all readiness of mind," I now continue to love and learn and obey truth (Acts 17:11). And "brother Great says" never comes even close to "the Lord says." A great teacher expects such payment.

I pay on my debt by "spending and being spent" in behalf of others who need the gospel — even when they do not appreciate it (2 Cor. 12:15). I may win one and thus pay my teacher.

"Owe no man anything." All debts should be paid — except to "love one another" which is never paid in full (Rom. 13:8). And I might add, neither is my debt to those who have taught me the way of salvation, have enlarged my perception of truth, have enriched my stewardship. "Thou owest me" they call. Yes, its true. How numerous the debtors; how great the debt! I will never pay out, but I must keep making the payments.

- Joe Fitch

> "A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read." - Mark Twain

- "Be true to your work, your word, and your friend."
- "He that gives good advice, builds with one hand; he that gives good counsel and good example, builds with both; but he that gives good admonition and bad example, builds with one hand and pulls down with the other."
- "A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury."
- "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Ways In Which God Shows No Partiality!"* (text: Rom. 2:9-11); Sunday evening: *"HOSEA: The Lord Has A Case Against The Inhabitants Of The Land!"*

SCHEDULE: Our Gospel Meeting will be July 28 – Aug. 2, Sun. regularly scheduled times, M-F at 7:00 p.m., with Tanner Campbell, of Piggott, AR.