**THE WORK OF THE CHURCH**

***Benevolence Is Not Our Mission***

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*- Ephesians 4:11-12

If I were to ask you what the work (or mission) of the Lord’s church is, could you tell me, giving book, chapter and verse from the New Testament?

I have often been told that the mission of the church is three-fold: Evangelism, Edification, Benevolence. For years I have struggled with that sentiment. The first two I heartily agree with, for I can give Bible authority for both Evangelism and Edification as the focus of Christ’s church.

For example, clearly Jesus came into this world to “*seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10). His commission to the apostles was to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel*” in order to save lost souls (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:19-20). The church was to be the “*pillar and support of the truth*” (I Timothy 3:15) to the world. That is clearly Evangelism as a “mission.”

Edification is also without doubt given a top priority as a work of the Lord’s people. Read the opening text above from Ephesians 4:11-16. Also read the last part of Matthew 28:20 which says after you baptized someone you must “*teach them to observe all things I have commanded you*.” That is Edification, pure and simple.

The world of “Christendom” (i.e. those who claim to be Christians) are more and more arguing for a social gospel that calls for the church to care for the physical and financial needs of the poor, both in and out of the church. They insist Benevolence is a primary “work” of the church. Even many of our own brethren are moving fast and furious into this mindset. Let me address this for the remainder of this article.

The Lord’s blood-bought church (Acts 20:28) certainly has scriptural authority to take up a collection for needy saints. I can give multiple verses to support this use of the collection we take up every first day of the week. Read the following:

“*Now concerning the* ***collection for the saints****, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come*.” (1 Cor 16:1-2)

A famine hit the world during the reign of Claudius Caesar so “*then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send* ***relief to the brethren*** *dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul*.” (Acts 11:27-30)

Those funds from churches in Macedonia and Achaia were collected, with Paul arguing those churches were “*imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the* ***ministering to the saints***.” (2 Cor. 8:1-12).

Other passages could be added to this list (read Acts 6:1-6; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:1-13; I Tim. 5:16). Each and every one of these reveal a very noticeable point. The benevolent collections were in every case, without exception, intended for “*saints*” (i.e. only believers, never for unbelievers). Especially note this: “*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*” (I Tim. 5:16). The church is not to be “**burdened**” even with caring for Christian widows who do not meet certain qualifications (please read the entire context of I Tim. 5). The ONLY use of church funds taken from a collection was for the use of saints, and that only under strict regulations. The church was never intended to be a benevolent society which doled out charity to a needy world, or even to every needy Christian!

Please, give serious thought to this. The mindset of virtually everyone these days is focused on the needs of the poor. Jesus said, “*the poor you will have with you always*” (Mark 14:7). He very well knew if the MISSION (i.e. the primary work given by Christ) of the church was to be a benevolent organization, there would be no end to fulfilling that work. Therefore, He intentionally limited His church in the realm of benevolence, giving authority to help the needy saints, but only on a small scale with such crisis as famines or widows being neglected. The church should not be “*burdened*” from its main task of preaching the gospel to a lost world and building up the body of Christ through worship and teaching.

The church belonging to Christ is primarily a Preaching and Teaching organization. Just as Gerber’s Baby Food Company once had as its slogan, “Babies are our business, our ONLY business,” so we might rephrase that to say of Christ’s church, “Saving Souls is our business, our ONLY business.” The task of helping the needy is assigned primarily to individual saints (Jam. 1:26-27; Gal. 6:10). That frees the church to do its primary mission of evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved.

If you see a flaw in this line of reasoning, I would love to hear from you.

Let us all do the work Christ has given us to do, all summed up in three words: Souls, Souls, Souls. Then, come Judgment Day, we can hear Him say to His church: “Mission Accomplished!”

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