

The Work and Worship of the church of Christ

Basics of the church of Christ – Sermon Number Two

◆ The Work of the church of Christ...

Any organization, religious or otherwise, has a purpose. Civic clubs are designed to provide help to communities. Health clubs are designed to help people lose weight and feel better. It is fitting that we ask what is the purpose, or work, of the church of Christ. In answering this very important question, it is imperative that we look to the scriptures and not to the traditions that many denominations have subscribed to.

To appropriately understand the work (and later in this study, the worship) of the church of Christ, one must examine the scriptures and let those scriptures have the final word. A firm reliance on the bedrock principle of the necessity of Biblical authority stated below will help all who desire to know the truth to focus their attention solely on the scriptures:

One must consider the following key passages: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17) and “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Peter 4:11). Upon the consideration of these passages, it should be clear, that in all matters of church organization, church doctrine and church practice, there must remain a firm reliance upon the Bible and it alone.

A search of the New Testament scriptures results in the finding that the Lord’s church should be involved in three works.

⇒ The Work of Benevolence

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “benevolence” as a “disposition to do good.” Generally, the term is associated with financial assistance to those in need. The Apostle Paul wrote about widows who didn’t have family to take care of them and said that allowing the church to aid these women was appropriate. To qualify for such assistance, these widows had to be members of the Lord’s church (I Timothy 5:3-16).

This brings us to an important point that separates the church of Christ from denominations. Many denominations are willing to use the money they've collected to fund a whole host of charity events in the name of benevolence. Yet, we must be cautious – the Lord's treasury is not a fund from which all people can benefit – only the saints can benefit from the treasury (I Corinthians 16:1). There is nothing wrong, according to the scriptures, with individuals helping their friends who are not members of the Lord's church. But to involve the church and its money in efforts benefiting the poor outside of the church would be going beyond the authority of the scriptures.

⇒ The Work of Edification

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that Christians are to work together, as members of the Lord's body, so as to promote the "growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:16). In fact, Christians are to come together to worship God and in doing so, "provoke" each other to "love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24-25). Christians in the church have the responsibility of looking out for each other. After all, to do so is to fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). Christians are to think of others more so than themselves, always seeking opportunities to do good to those who are of the "household of faith" (Galatians 6:9-10).

Again, it is important to distinguish the church of Christ from denominations in how the work of edification and encouragement occur. Many churches have kitchens for "fellowship meals." Many churches build large gymnasiums for weekly basketball games. Many churches have playgrounds and a host of programs to entertain the children. Not a single one of these things are wrong within themselves – the need for recreation is certainly understandable. Yet, such is not the work of the church as we read the New Testament. Paul wrote that, "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

The church of Christ understands the importance of edification and desires to engage in the efforts of building up the saints through scripturally authorized means.

⇒ The Work of Evangelism

It is essential that the church be involved with the spreading of the gospel. Jesus urged His followers to "Go" and "preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). Furthermore, the church is to be the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). The church of Christ is concerned with preaching that truth, which, according to Christ, is the word of God and is the power unto salvation (John 17:17; Romans 1:16).

It is not the role of the church to teach and educate in the general sense. Nowhere in the New Testament is the church authorized to engage in the work of general education – only spiritual education. Thus, the church of Christ does not provide opportunities for general education or childcare that is coupled with general education.

Furthermore, the scriptures provide no authorization for church monies to be given to colleges or universities. The New Testament does not prohibit a college or university from providing religious-based education. It does not authorize, however, church money being used for such an education that will certainly include other topics besides Biblical topics.

A final point should be made regarding the work of evangelism. A number of denominations provide funding to “missionary societies.” These organizations receive funding from various churches in multiple locations and then decide how the money might best be used throughout their “mission fields.” Preaching the gospel to the lost in foreign places is certainly noble and important. Yet, the New Testament pattern must be followed.

Throughout the New Testament, churches gave money to preachers. Preachers used the money to fund their efforts. Writing to the church at Philippi, Paul thanked that group of saints for their aid (Philippians 4:16). The Apostle also told the Corinthians that he had received wages from various churches so that he could continue his evangelistic efforts (II Corinthians 11:8).

One of the greatest perversions of Biblical authority in this area lies with the missionary organization, *The Herald of Truth*, which, as of 1952, began working under the auspices of the Highland church of Christ in Abilene, Texas. This organization seeks to spread the gospel in multiple locations throughout the world. To fund these efforts, monies are raised from individuals and from churches. In doing so, individual churches lose their ability to account for their funds and furthermore, violate the authority of the scriptures by going against the New Testament pattern. Thus, the Highland church of Christ was a church that, it seems, would have its lam pstand removed for no longer following the pattern laid forth by Christ and His inspired writers (Revelation 2:5).

Churches *should* be involved with “missionary” work – spreading the gospel both at home and abroad. Yet, churches need to do this in the way discussed in the scriptures – individually supporting preachers and in doing so, maintaining a sense of accountability for those funds.

◆ The Worship of the church of Christ ...

In John 4:23-24, Jesus stated the following:

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Christians are responsible for engaging in the worship of the only true and living God, giving praise and adoration to the only Creator of the universe and the sustainer of all life. To worship God in spirit, Christians must constantly try to work on the appropriate attitude – one of reverence for God and an appreciation for what He has done. Equally important is truth – worshipping God according to His commands. God has laid out for the Christians what they should do for Him.

The church of Christ seeks to look at those things which God has commanded and do them without any alteration. Through obedience in everyday life, Christians should constantly worship God. As a collection of saints taking part in worship, though, God has discussed the specifics with which Christians should approach Him. An examination of the scriptures illustrates that Christians are to be involved in the worship of God in five major areas.

⇒ Praying to God

When the church comes together, Christians pray. Jesus spoke a parable in Luke 18 stating that “men always ought to pray” (Luke 18:1). The Apostle Paul taught us to “pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17). The church of Christ understands that if prayer was this important 2000 years ago, surely it is as important today. Thus, when the church gathers together, members of the Lord’s church pray.

⇒ Studying God’s Word

When brethren gathered together on the first day of the week in Troas, Paul stood up and preached the gospel (Acts 20:7). The Christians of Berea studied their Scriptures daily, desiring to know God’s word more accurately (Acts 17:11). The church of Christ must concur with scriptures – the study of God’s word is important, and that’s why Bible classes and sermons are a key part of the worship at the church of Christ.

It is important to note, perhaps here more than elsewhere, that the New Testament frequently discusses the preaching of the gospel – and this preaching was done by men.

Many denominations allow women to preach. Women *should* be teachers of the Bible. In fact, Paul told Titus that the older women should be teaching the younger women (Titus 2:3-4). Yet, women cannot publicly teach a man or preach a sermon, for, according to Paul, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (I Timothy 2:12). At the church of Christ, men lead the services as this is what the Holy Spirit commanded through the writing of Paul.

⇒ Singing Praises to God

The New Testament church praised God in song. Thus, when the church of Christ gathers together, its members sing to praise God and teach one another through the words of the songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). The songs are designed to provoke thoughts about God and help Christians better understand and praise God.

One will quickly notice that the church of Christ does not use any piano, organ, band or other mechanical instrument. The church of Christ does not use such instruments in their singing because such was not authorized in the New Testament. (Sermon number three in this series will more fully address this subject as it requires more time.)

⇒ Giving Back to God

On the first day of the week, members of the church of Christ give of their means. The New Testament commands Christians to “lay something aside” on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2). The church of Christ does *not* take up a collection on any day but the first day of the week. Collecting funds on any other day would be against the authority of the scriptures. The church of Christ does not have fundraisers, rummage sales, or bake sales to collect funds. These methods of raising money are unauthorized.

⇒ Partaking of the Lord’s Supper

In Acts 20:7, brethren came together on the first day of the week and broke bread. In I Corinthians 11, Paul discussed the attitude that Christians should have in eating the bread and drinking the cup, discerning the Lord’s body and recognizing His great sacrifice (I Corinthians 11:23-29).

Many churches have made decisions to partake of the Lord’s Supper on fewer occasions than every week. Some denominations choose to offer the Lord’s Supper every three months or just once a month. The reasoning for this, it seems, is that by partaking of the memorial feast less often, it will have greater meaning. The problem with this logic is that it is an unauthorized action – the Bible talks about brethren breaking bread on the

first day of the week. Therefore, the church of Christ, in following the pattern set forth 2000 years earlier, partakes of the Lord's Supper *each* first day of the week.

◆ Some Final Thoughts ...

The church of Christ centers everything it teaches and does on the scriptures. So many times, denominations, thinking they know what's best, make decisions to aid in the work of the church and the worship of God. Yet, we are not authorized to alter the plans put forth 2000 years ago. As servants of God, we owe it to Him to continue to render obedience to His plan and follow His ideas, for it is to Him that we will answer for all the things we have done in this life.