

God's People At Work



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God's People At Work (1)

Little study of the New Testament is necessary to learn that God expects His people to work. The *saved* are “*created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained*” (Eph.2:10), and Jesus went to the cross to “*purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Tit.2:14). It is plain then, God’s people have been spiritually created in Christ to be zealous of the good works God ordained.

Early Christians were made aware constantly that *good works* were to be performed. Titus was instructed to show himself “*a pattern of good works*” (Tit.2:7). He was also to teach the brethren “*to be ready to every good work*” (3:1) and to “*be careful to maintain good works*” (3:10,14). Paul often reminded those addressed in his epistles to be “*fruitful in every good work*” (Col.1:10; 2 Thess.2:17; Heb.13:21), and brethren were challenged to “*consider one another to provoke unto love and good works*” (Heb.10:24). The works God ordained serve to draw praise and glory to Him from those who observe His people at work (Matt.5:16; 1 Pet.2:12). These texts and many more demonstrate that God’s people are to work.

I find that most Christians understand they are to work for the Lord but somehow fail to comprehend *what* to do or *how* to perform it. God has ordained *what* His people are to do (Eph.2:10) and has revealed it for our learning in the Scriptures (2 Tim.3:16-17). Failure to know *what* is required can be solved by a knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Tim.2:15) and failure to know *how* to do the work can be resolved by determination. We learn to do what we understand we *must* do. The wise *hear* and *do* (Matt.7:24-25). The foolish only *hear* (7:26-27) and then do as they please (Matt.7:22-23).

Misconceptions

The knowledge that God’s people are to work coupled with the desire to be acceptable to Him with the least amount of effort has led to many errors and misconceptions concerning the

performance of the work. Some evidently think their responsibility to work is discharged simply by attending one hour’s service a week, but a careful examination of Luke 9:23 and other related texts quickly dispels this notion. Following the Lord is a *daily* task that cannot be completed in one hour. Even faithful attendance of all local church services does not fulfill the requirements of Luke 9:23 for constant service. Something more is demanded and expected.

Others think passive obedience, *i.e.*, not doing anything wrong, is all that is needed, but James writes, “*be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*” (Jas.1:22). Action is required. The house swept and garnished (Lk.11:24-26) must be filled with deeds demonstrating positive action (1 Jno.3:17-18; 1 Tim.6:17-19).

Still others think the work done by the local church of which one becomes a part by local identity, *viz.*, attendance, giving and encouraging those who actually do the works, is all that is required. Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 5:16 shows the fallacy of this reasoning. He said, “*If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged, that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.*” It is evident that believers are burdened with responsibilities which are not to become the burden of the local church. One cannot, therefore, fulfill all God expects of him as a Christian by faithfully discharging his duty as a member of the local church. Additional work is required.

Some even have the far fetched notion that the only way God’s people work is for the local congregation to make donations from its treasury to various organizations involved in what is termed “good works.” If this philosophy were true, one could as reasonably raise his children by the local church making a donation to “Save The Children.” Such reasoning is without logic. In the first place, there is no scriptural authority for the local church to be

involved in such activities but, even if there were, it would not relieve the Christian of his responsibility to do the works God specifically requires of him. The Bible teaches, *“let every man prove his own work, . . . For every man shall bear his own burden”* (Gal. 6:4-5).

Teaching Neglected

Over the past third century, discussion of issues relating to institutionalism and the work of the local church have somewhat eclipsed our teaching concerning the Christian’s personal work. One could readily get the impression that God’s people only work through the local congregation, or that at least most of the work is to be done by the organized efforts of the local body. The institutionalist position in essence destroyed the need for the Christian to work. They argued that whatever the individual can do the local church can do. Naturally, if the local church does the work, the individual has nothing more to do. Some even went so far as to contend that if the Christian worked apart from the church he robbed God of the glory He expected to receive through the church (Eph.3:21). The work God’s people are to do as individuals has in many cases been obscured.

The war against institutionalism had to be fought but the fight demanded more and more attention be given to the work of the local church and less to the individual. Hours otherwise spent teaching upon personal work were necessarily directed toward stemming the tide of digression. The result was, in many cases, brethren did not learn what God expected of them except as it pertained to their association as members of the local church. Satan could not be more pleased.

Two Ways To Work

All agree that God expects the local congregation to work. Numerous passages can be cited, and will be in future studies, authorizing the local church to function as a unit to do the limited work scripturally permitted. This is one way God’s people work, but *it is not the only way*. A study of the Scriptures reveal that the greater portion of work God anticipates from His people is to come from individual Christians

doing their *personal work*. A percentage ratio might show 90% expected from individuals and 10% from the local unit. No one can do this work for us. The local church at work cannot substitute for it nor relieve us of the personal responsibility. The local church can only do what it is authorized by the Scriptures to do and, when it has done this, it still has not touched a single work assigned the Christian.

“Every tree is known by his own fruit” (Lk.6:44), and *“every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away”* (Jno.15:2). *“Let every man prove his own work,.. for every man shall bear his own burden”* (Gal.4:5). The burden of doing the works of God is upon every Christian. Paul *“exhorted and comforted and charged every one”* of the Thessalonians how to *“walk worthy of God”* (1 Thess.2:11). To the Colossians he was *“warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”* (Col.1:28). Why? Because *every man* must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom.14:10; 2 Cor.5:10) to give account of himself to God (Rom.14:12) who shall judge *“according to every man’s work”* (1 Pet.1:17; Rev.20:12-13), rewarding them accordingly (Matt.16:27; Rom.2:6).

The question then of whether the Christian must be involved personally in God’s work is answered. He must! Failure to do the work required on a personal basis would be disastrous (Matt.25:4,18,45-46), and ignorance of the work to be done is inexcusable. God has ordained the works and made them known to us (Eph.2:10; 2 Tim.3:16-17).

Conclusion

Since God requires His children to work and since we shall be called to account for our actions, it behooves us to learn what we are to do as service to God. As pointed out previously, this involves learning what constitutes the Christian’s personal work as well as the work of the local congregation. In articles to come we shall give attention to God’s people at work from both vantage points.☺

God's People At Work (2)

The Christian at Work

The people of God are to be zealously engaged in doing the *good works* God has ordained (Eph.2:10; Tit.2:14). These works are to be performed by the people of God in two ways, neither of which cancels the other, namely; individually and congregationally. In this article our attention is directed to a discussion of the Christian at work.

Personal Development

The newly converted person enters the family of God by the new birth a new creature, having been purified and cleansed from all past sins (Jno.3:3-5; Rom.6:3-4; 2 Cor.5:17; 1 Pet.1:22-23). God's goal for each new born child is that he be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom.8:29). To accomplish this, Christ must be formed in the new son (Gal.4:19), dwelling in the heart by faith (Eph.3:17), as he follows the sinless example of the Son of God (1 Pet.2:21-22).

No one attains to this perfection without effort. Girding up the loins of the mind, being sober, obedient and holy demand work for which we shall be judged (1 Pet.1:13-17). Laying aside all our former lusts in ignorance (1 Pet.1:14), e.g., malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil speaking, involves constant work by the Christian (1 Pet.2:1). None of these things come easy. Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet.3:18) prescribes that we "*desire the sincere milk of the word*" that we might grow (1 Pet.2:2). Each person must develop, cultivate and activate this desire.

Peter lists seven things the Christian must work to add to his faith (2 Pet.1:5-8). The first is *virtue*. Virtue denotes excellence particularly as it pertains to moral goodness (cf. Vine). Having been purified by faith (Acts 15:9), the new born child stands before God without stain. Not since the day of his innocence has that person been so pure and holy but now, having been cleansed, he is to work toward maintaining that purity (excellence) in life. With Jesus before him as an example, the Christian learns to possess

his vessel in sanctification (1 Thess.4:4) as he puts to death every member of his body that sins (Col.3:5-15). Without this excellence he cannot see God (Heb.12:14). "*And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure*" (1 Jno.3:3). No one can do this for him. Each must attain virtue by himself (Gal.6:4-5).

Next comes *knowledge*. Knowledge is gained by learning, and learning is augmented by study. The Christian who desires to be an unashamed workman must study rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim.2:15). Study is necessary to prove and understand the acceptable will of the Lord (Eph.5:10,17). Peter exhorts, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*" (1 Pet.3:15). Only through dedication and work can we attain unto this required posture. The rewards are worth the effort. By gaining knowledge one's understanding is enlightened (Eph.1:17-18), God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge are uncovered (Col.2:3), and His grace and peace are multiplied (2 Pet.1:2-3).

Temperance follows knowledge. By virtue one develops the desire to be the best person humanly possible. By knowledge one learns what God wants him to be, and by temperance one stays on course. In describing the Christian's life as a race, Paul said, "*Every man that striveth for mastery is temperate in all things*" (1 Cor.9:25). The temptation to cheat, cut corners and even quit are alternatives to which we might yield without temperance. Staying on course is not easy, but learning to control one's self helps one gain valuable experience which assists in winning the battle (Rom.5:3-4). No one can develop this ability for us. We must learn to control ourselves.

Patience follows temperance closely. One learns to stay on course by exercising temperance. For how long? Just as long as

patience endures. Patience induces one's self control to abide. Patience is the ability to see it through without folding. It is not always easy to *"be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"* (Jas.1:19) but, if we remember we must give account for every idle word we speak (Matt.12:36), perhaps we would be more prone to *"let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (Jas.1:4). Patience is a work of personal development every Christian must seek to achieve. No one can do this for us.

Godliness "denotes that piety which, characterized by a Godward attitude, does that which is well-pleasing to Him" (Vine, Vol.2, page 162). Godliness, like temperance, is designed to keep one on course. Temperance keeps one on course by preventing him from doing wrong. Godliness keeps one on course by projecting the proper goal before the Christian. Godliness means being devoted to one's commitment; staying on course because one earnestly desires to please the Lord. It is the attitude of heart that causes one to *"seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God"* (Col.3:1-2). Only you can do that. No one can do it for you.

Every child of God must learn to show *brotherly kindness* (love of brethren) also. This is not always an easy thing to do, yet it must be done (1 Jno.2:9-11; 4:20-21). Peter instructs that since we are purified *"unto the unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently"* (1 Pet.1:22). We may have to work at it, indeed we will, but it is what God expects of every child of His. Even when there are conflicts of interests, attitudes and manners which are obnoxious to us, God expects us to find room in our hearts for brotherly kindness (love). This is a work of personal development each must achieve.

Also, every child of God must possess *charity* (love). Brotherly love is tempered by the family relationship while charity knows no bounds. The Christian must exercise love in relationship to every realm of human experience. The characteristics of this love are found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-7. Each would be

blessed to make a notation of the positive traits love possesses as well as to list the negative traits love does not produce and apply them to himself to see if he possesses love. Do you truly love your wife or husband, children, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, etc.? This is not always easy to do, yet it can be done by each if we work to achieve it.

Other lists of traits Christians are to develop may also be cited. Joy, peace, gentleness, meekness (Gal.5:22-23), and the qualities of tenderheartedness, forgiveness and humility must also be developed (Eph.4:32; Col.3:12-15). All of these traits that Christians are to develop provide a challenge which cannot be neglected. As Peter said, *"If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall"* (2 Pet.1:8-10).

Conclusion

While there is much more the Christian is to do as service to God, it should be apparent that it would be useless for him to perform it if he refuses to grow personally. All of his other works cannot compensate for this failure any more than the success of other Christians in personal development excuse him of the responsibility. Each man must bear his own burden and prove his own work (Gal.6:4-5). Therefore, let each accept the responsibility to grow and develop as God would have us do so that we may boldly proclaim, *"It is no longer I that lives, but Christ living in me"* (Gal.2:20). 🙏

God's People At Work (3)

The Christian At Work

In our last installment we discussed the Christian's work of personal development. The house swept and garnished by gospel obedience must be decorated with personal traits that glorify God. This does not come easy. The Christian must work hard to become what God wishes. In this study we shall discuss other work the Christian must do.

Being An Example

Every Christian must exemplify what every believer is to be. Paul told Timothy, "*Be thou an example of the believers*" (1 Tim.4:12). If Timothy was to be an example of the believers, then all believers are to be examples. Each must let his light shine so others will see Christ living in them (Matt.5:16; 1 Pet.2:12; Gal.2:20).

Being an example to others must flow into every sphere of the Christian's activity. One is a Christian all of the time and must model proper conduct everywhere. In the *home* the Christian husband or wife must set the proper example before their unbelieving companion and children (1 Cor.7:10-16; 1 Pet.3:1-3). Children are to obey parents in the Lord for this is right (Eph.6:1; Col.3:20). All members of the household are to conduct themselves properly to influence others. No one can do this for us. This is personal work each must do.

The Christian must be an example to *society* in general. Paul said, "*Provide things honest in the sight of all men,*" and "*if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*" (Rom.12:17-18). Again, "*Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification*" (Rom.15:2). Peter instructs that our manner of life (conversation) must be honest among all (1 Pet.2:12). In every association in life, the Christian is to conduct himself as a representative of Jesus Christ. No one can do this for us. God expects it of every child of His (2 Cor.6:17-18).

Every Christian as a *citizen* must submit to every ordinance of the country where he resides

(Rom.12:1; 1 Pet.2:13-17). He must pay his taxes, fees and licenses, and submit to every law, regardless of how unreasonable they seem, as long as the laws of national citizenship do not conflict with God's higher law (Acts 4:19; 5:29). To resist the civil law is to resist the ordinance of God and invites damnation (Rom.13:2). No one can satisfy the demands of civil law in our stead. It is a personal responsibility required of all.

In the *business* realm likewise the Christian is to work with his hands to provide his needs (Eph.4:28; 1 Tim.5:8). A man who will not work to provide for himself should not be fed (2 Thess.3:10). The Christian cannot be slothful in business (Rom.12:11). Both employers and employees are instructed of God how to behave in each role (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 1 Pet.2:18-21). No one can do these things for us. Each must bear his own burden.

Whether in the domestic, social, civil or business realm, the Christian has certain responsibilities to carry out that cannot be ignored. He is to display the conduct expected by God in all these areas. There is no substitute for it. It must be fulfilled. In this same sense the Christian sustains a relationship to the *local church* as a member. He is to assemble (Heb.10:25), participate properly in the worship (1 Cor.11:27-28; 14:15-16; 16:2; 2 Cor.9:7; Acts 11:29), and supply his part effectually in whatever his ability allows (1 Cor.12:12-27; Eph.4:16). These things are a part of the Christian's personal work. He accepted this duty when he accepted the Lord and, as an example of believers, he must faithfully fulfill his responsibility. God expects it of him and no one can do it for him.

Helping Others

The Christian must also be willing to be hospitable (Rom.12:12). This work starts at home. The Scriptures bind upon Christians the responsibility of providing for those of their own household (1 Tim.5:8). Children and even grandchildren must accept the burden of

supplying their parent's physical needs when they cannot provide for themselves (1 Tim.5:4,16). The burden of caring for the indigent is upon the family of the needy before it becomes the duty of others. Christians who refuse their duty to care for their own family members deny the faith and become worse than infidels (1 Tim.5:8). This is a part of the Christian's personal work.

The Christian's work of helping others, however, reaches beyond the home. Paul said, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal.6:10). This means a benevolent spirit must guide the Christian into acts of service outside the home. First, this spirit should be displayed toward brethren in Christ. John said, *"Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"* (1 Jno.3:17). In His picture of the judgment, Jesus portrays the Son of man rewarding certain ones and punishing others because of their benevolent spirit or lack of it toward their brethren (Matt.25:31-46). It pays to help your brethren. Second, it should be manifested toward all men. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Jas.2:8). Jesus teaches that our neighbor is anyone we meet needing assistance (Lk.10:25-37). Our responsibility to help others is limited only by our ability and opportunity. When the opportunity arises one should weigh the situation carefully before refusing. If we have the ability and opportunity to assist someone and the work is right, then, we have the responsibility.

Some works of personal service to others are specifically mentioned: viz., feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, lodging the stranger, clothing the naked, comforting the sick and persecuted, and visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions (Matt.25:35-36; Heb.13:2-3; Jas.1:27). Need we further explanations of the services we can perform? Or need we only the determination and imagination of Dorcas (Acts 9:39) and Onesiphorus (2 Tim.1:16-18) to perform these works? The later of course, and God shall hold us accountable.

Teaching Others

According to the Great Commission the apostles were to teach all nations, baptize them, and then teach them to do the same things they were doing (Matt.28:19-20). This round robin method of instruction was designed to promote the continued spread of the gospel into all the world. Faithful Christians were to be entrusted with the gospel who in turn would teach others (2 Tim.2:2). Apparently early Christians accepted the challenge and fulfilled the charge. Those first converted in Jerusalem, when scattered by the great persecution, went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Congregations were established in many places, not as the result of local church work but, as the result of Christians doing personal work. Acquilla and Priscilla accepted the opportunity to teach Apollos (Acts 18:26). Brethren were encouraged to grow and to study so they could teach others (2 Tim.2:15; Heb.5:12; 1 Pet.3:15; 2 Pet.3:18). This they did which explains the rapid growth of Christianity during those early years.

No less a responsibility rests on the shoulders of Christians in this twentieth century. The Great Commission remains valid. The charge to sanctify the Lord in our hearts so we can answer those who question our hope is still binding. Each Christian will give account to God for his works. Even though we do not all have the same abilities and opportunities, we do have some and cannot afford to underestimate the power within us. God shall hold us responsible. Each must carry his own load (Gal.6:4-5).

Local Church Membership

The Christian also has a responsibility as a member of the local church (Acts 9:19,26; 11:26; 13:1). This work does not supplant or cancel the activity required of him in these other realms but rather becomes another sphere of spiritual labor. Neither is this work to be confused with the limited work the congregation is scripturally authorized to do. This work will be discussed in later articles. Our study presently deals only with the work Christians personally must contribute as members of the local church.

First, the Christian must assemble and encourage other Christians to do the same (Heb.10:24-25). The scriptures indicate that deliberate failure to assemble with the saints is “*wilful sin*” and constitutes trodding on Jesus Christ, counting His shed blood unholy, and despising the Holy Spirit (Heb.10:26-29). The consequences of such practice will be disastrous (Heb.10:30-31). Early Christians evidently understood the significance of this command for the *whole* church came together (1 Cor.14:23) on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Would it not be a marvelous thing if we could convince all the brethren today that this work comes before all else and have the *whole* church together on the first day of the week?

Christians are also to fulfill their privileged duty as participants in the assembly worship. Each is to sing (1 Cor.14:15; Col. 3:16), pray (1 Cor.14:15-16), listen attentively (1 Cor.14:31), partake of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor.11:28), and give (1 Cor.16:2; 2 Cor.9:7). No one can do these things for us. We must do our part.

Second, the Christian must submit to the oversight of the elders of the local body as they seek to fulfill their responsibility to feed the flock (Acts 20:28; Heb.13:17; 1 Pet.5:2). Services conducted by the elders designed for feeding the flock are for the benefit of each Christian. Those who refuse to eat when the table is set deprive themselves of this spiritual nourishment and fail in their responsibility to submit to the elders. This is the duty of each Christian. No one can take our place.

Finally, the Christian as a member of the local church is to supply his part effectually in whatever his ability allows so the congregation may grow and be edified (Eph.4:16). All of us have different abilities to be used (1 Cor.12:12-27) and, to whatever degree we are capable and are asked to perform on behalf of the local work, we should be ready and willing to act. It is our duty as children of God.

Conclusion

In our studies thus far, we have found that the Christian is created in Christ Jesus to do the good works God ordained (Eph.2:10). There are

certain works the Christian must do of his own initiative. He must involve himself in a program of personal development, be an example of believers in all areas of life, help others, teach others, and fulfill his part as a member of the local church. No one can do these works for us. Each must bear his own burden (Gal.6:4-5) because God will hold each responsible for these works at the judgment (1 Pet.1:17). *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Cor.7:1).🙏

God's People At Work (4)

The Congregation At Work

Our previous studies have focused attention upon the work God's people do individually. Now our attention turns to a study of the work God's people do congregationally, *i.e.*, the work the local church does as its members do *together* the things commanded and permitted to be done *together* as a congregation. This involves to a large degree how the church may spend its money since the treasury is the one thing that involves every member. Much of the work the congregation does is done through their money at work.

It appears there are three reasons for the organized existence of the local church. First, it exists to afford saints with their local identity opportunity to worship God together (Acts 2:42-44; 20:7; 1 Cor.10,11,14; Heb.10:25). Second, the congregation exists to enact disciplinary measures, both instructive and corrective, that preserve the sanctification of the saints. This involves edification, exhortation, admonition, reproof, rebukes and even withdrawals when necessary. Third, the local church exists to do a limited work. (It may be said that the worship and discipline of the local church come within the scope of its work.) In meeting its requirements in these areas, the local church is under the oversight of its own officials (elders) who rule in all aspects of its endeavor.

Scriptural Work

All work in which God's people become involved must be scriptural whether performed by the individual or the congregation. Scriptural means, "of, pertaining to, contained in, or according to, the scriptures" (Webster). Scriptural work, then, must be in harmony with and authorized by the scriptures, otherwise it is without divine authority. Scriptural authority for God's work may be either *specific* or *generic*. Designated works with specific legislation regarding their performance become commandments, and designated works without specific legislation regarding their

accomplishment grants liberty to the participants in performing them.

Every congregation should be concerned about the scripturalness of its work. God expects His people to be zealous of good works (Tit.2:14), yet He has ordained and revealed in the Scriptures the works to be performed (Eph.2:10; 2 Tim.3:16-17). For these works congregations shall be judged. The Lord judged the seven churches of Asia according to their works (Rev.2-3). Sardis was condemned as dead because of incomplete works (Rev.3:1-2). Should we not expect the Lord to judge congregations thusly today? He knows our works also and will judge accordingly (cf. Matt.7:22-23).

Knowing God's Will

It becomes imperative that we know God's will concerning the work to be done. There are three ways to know God's will. First, we know His will by *expressed statements*. This is a forthright declaration of His mind (1 Cor.2:16). Second, we know His will by considering *approved examples* (Phil.4:9). Examples that are approved, *i.e.*, examples that do not violate other biblical principles or find rebuke elsewhere in the Scriptures, reflect commands, acceptable practices and conduct. Third, *necessary inferences* are the unstated necessary parts of statements and examples which are understood without statement. By these three ways we come to know God's will. In fact, these are the ways we come to understand anything.

To illustrate, let us suppose you say to your son, "Son, get in the car and go to Convenient and purchase a package of weiners like those I purchased there yesterday." A number of things are *expressly stated* and specified. Obedience will demand compliance in all areas of specification. One thing reflects a command based upon an *example* set the previous day, and a host of things are *necessarily inferred* that are not stated. For example, you did not tell your son to open the car door, sit down, close the

door, insert the key in the ignition, turn the steering wheel, or any number of other things that might be necessary to driving the car. All of these things were necessarily understood and included within the statement. So it is with the word of God. By expressed statements, approved examples and necessary inferences we come to know God's will.

Work Generically Authorized

A number of passages generically authorize the local church to work. These passages have many times been used to teach the exclusive work of the local church. We believe this to be a misuse of the passages though we do believe them to generally include the work of the local body.

Matthew 28:19-20. This account of the Great Commission teaches the apostles to go teach, baptize and, then, to teach those baptized to "go teach." There is a twofold responsibility bound upon the apostles of our Lord and those whom they converted, namely; evangelize and edify. This is responsibility placed upon God's people both individually and congregationally as the various examples of His people at work demonstrate.

Ephesians 4:11-13. This passage has often been used to prove that God has given the local church a threefold responsibility: evangelism, edification and benevolence. While the local church has responsibility in all these areas, as we shall see, this is not the intended point in this text. The NIV seems to convey the true meaning of the passage. "*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ.*" The passage teaches that these officers were given to prepare God's people to perform works of service that would bring them to maturity. The officers mentioned were not all local officials but, since local officials are included in the number, we must understand that the local church and its work

are included. Two things which assist in bringing the church to maturity are evangelism and edification.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8. This passage shows the Thessalonians became examples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia which lifted a great burden from Paul and his co-laborers. How they accomplished this is not clear. The work could have been accomplished individually, collectively, or both.

1 Timothy 3:15. In this passage Timothy was instructed by Paul how to behave himself "*in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" It is doubtful that Paul's statement was intended to instruct Timothy in his behaviour in the local church alone, yet it is clear the local church is included due to the nature of the instruction given Timothy throughout the epistle regarding his work as an evangelist within the local church. The local church then has a duty to perform as pillar and ground of the truth.

A Necessary Distinction

Some may say, "I see no difference between the church and the individual. Whatever the individual can do the church can do." As previously pointed out, confusion over this matter has been responsible for many errors. The advocates of general benevolence, institutionalism, instrumental music, etc., have used this argument to promote their innovations.

A careful study of a few selected texts will show that the Scriptures make a distinction between individual and congregational responsibility that must be understood. Let us see the difference. In Matthew 18:15-18 the Lord outlined a three step procedure to be followed in dealing with brethren who sin against us. First, talk privately with the guilty brother. Second, if he refuses to repent, take witnesses for a second talk. To this point, the individual is doing his personal work. Third, if he refuses to repent after the second attempt, tell it to the church. It was individual action until the third step, then it became congregational. We can see the difference.

In 2 Corinthians 11:8 Paul mentions that he

robbed other churches (local) taking wages of them to do the Corinthians service. Did he mean he was receiving support from individuals, or did he say what he meant? Paul often received assistance from individuals and recognized them for their service (cf. Rom.16:3,6,9,23; 2 Tim.1:16-18). He made a difference between churches and individuals.

oversight of the local bishops.☹

When it comes to the Lord's Supper we usually see the difference. We understand the Lord's Supper is to be observed in an assembly of the whole church come together upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.11:18-34). To deny this principle would ultimately lead to the destruction of the local church. If there be no distinction between what the individual and the church practices, then why may not the Christian observe the Lord's Supper *at home* on the first day of the week? If this doctrine were accepted the local church would soon cease to exist because, like it or not, the Lord's Supper is the one thing which usually keeps the brethren coming. There is a difference, however, and the Lord's Supper is to be observed by Christians when they come together to do together the things commanded to be done together in an assembly of the saints.

Our study of this point would not be complete without mentioning 1 Timothy 5:16. This passage is clear. Christians have responsibilities which are not and can not become the burden of the local church. If individual Christians are to provide the care of widows who fall their lot and the local church is to only be charged with the permanent care of *widows indeed* (1 Tim.5:9-10), then the local church cannot and must not involve itself in doing the work that the individual is to do. Thus the doctrine that teaches churches may do anything individuals may do is false.

Conclusion

In this study, we have sought to show that God's people have a limited work to do congregationally and that this work too must be authorized by the Scriptures. In our next study we shall show from the Scriptures specific works the local church is authorized to perform working through the local treasury under the

God's People At Work (5)

The Congregation At Work

What works may churches of Christ scripturally do? We have before demonstrated that the local church has work to perform as a unit under the oversight of its bishops. It can only do the work scripturally authorized. This to a large degree involves the congregation working through the local treasury.

Preaching The Gospel

Congregations were taught by inspired men to have a part in preaching the gospel by supplying the physical needs of ministers of the gospel whether at home or away. The Corinthians were instructed concerning the right of those who preached the gospel among them to live by the gospel. They were also instructed concerning their responsibility to support them (1 Cor.9:6-16). Apparently Paul instructed all the churches concerning this responsibility (2 Cor.12:13). Though Paul had not used this power at Corinth, he established its rightfulness as an acceptable practice. It appears the Corinthians had enjoyed the services of local preachers and had paid for the service (1 Cor.9:12). Both Timothy and Titus worked among them (1 Cor.4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor.12:18).

Other churches used local preachers also. Timothy did local work at Ephesus (1 Tim.1:3). Titus worked among the churches of Crete (Tit.1:5). Tychicus was sent to Ephesus to relieve Timothy (2 Tim.4:12) and Artemas apparently relieved Titus on Crete (Tit.3:12). Some evidence indicates Philip lived and worked in Cesarea for about 25 years (Acts 8:40; 21:8). All these men were authorized to receive support from the churches they served (1 Cor.9:6-16). The local congregation, then, may work to support a local preacher or preachers who work among them as evangelists.

At least two congregations with God's approval sent men to labor in other fields. Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem "that he should go as far as Antioch" (Acts 11:22), and Barnabas and Paul were sent by

the church at Antioch on their first missionary journey. It is not stated that these churches gave material assistance to these men but the following paragraph will show that such policy was acceptable.

The principle that says "*they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel*" (1 Cor.9:14) provides scriptural authority for the support of gospel preachers in foreign fields. The apostle Paul received wages from other churches while establishing the church in Corinth (2 Cor.11:8). The church at Philippi sent to Paul's needs time and again (Phil.4:15-17). The assistance supplied was sent *directly* to Paul and not through some board of directors, society or other congregation. In this way the congregations worked through the assistance sent. The congregation under the oversight of its local officers remained in complete control of their own work.

Local churches may teach the gospel at home and away in other ways too. The commands to teach and preach generically authorize the use of such methods as expedite the commands. The use of radio, TV, newspapers, bulletins, magazines, tracts, correspondence courses, and Bible class literature provide means by which churches work through their money at work. Bible classes, gospel meetings, lecture programs, debates, open forums, etc., are efforts of the local church to do its work of preaching the gospel. When congregations use these expedients, they do nothing more than preach the gospel as authorized.

Local churches are authorized to preach the gospel. This responsibility must be fulfilled by each church according to their ability and opportunity. Expedient methods and arrangements may be used by the church to fulfill this responsibility so long as said methods and arrangements do not constitute practices contrary and in addition to God's ordained work. Congregations may not fulfill their duty in

preaching the gospel by making donations to “sponsoring churches” or institutions developed to do the work God authorized the congregations to do. Such arrangements are without divine authority, rob the churches of their ability and opportunities to work, steal from their autonomy, reduce them to nothing more than contributing entities, and destroy their desire and initiative to work. Let each congregation recognize their ability and opportunities and seek to discharge their duty under the oversight of the local organization. In this way each congregation can do its work of preaching the gospel in a divinely approved way.

Edifying Its Members

The elders of the local church are charged with the responsibility of feeding the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet.5:2). The local membership is charged with submitting to their oversight (1 Thess.5:12-13; Heb.13:17). In this way *“the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”* (Eph.4:16).

Much edification within the local church takes place by individual members doing their duty toward each other (Heb.10:24-25). However, the local body has a responsibility toward itself in an organized way. Part of this edification takes place when the church comes together in the assembly for worship (1 Cor.14:26).

Other methods of strengthening and building up the local membership may also be used by the congregation. Bible classes, special classes for special studies, edification meetings, week-end meetings, debates, tracts, subscriptions to various publications, etc., may be used by the local church to edify its members. All of these are expedient means of accomplishing a required work (edification) and must not be considered as a substitute to the edification required in the assembly worship. The work of edification is a local need and responsibility and may be fulfilled by the local organization in any way that does not overstep

the bounds of scriptural authority.

Assisting Needy Saints

The first congregational activity recorded, apart from the worship of God, was the relief of needy saints within the church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45). Two factors contributed to the development of this problem within the first church. First, its membership was made up of Jews, many of whom were many miles removed from their homes. When converted, these Christians were detained in Jerusalem for indoctrination which left them without material substance for survival. Other Christians who were more fortunate shared their homes, possessions and wealth to sustain them. Second, the acceptance of this new heresy (?) evidently invited an economic blockade from the inhabitants of Jerusalem. These factors created a problem which quickly tested the faith of the new converts.

As the church grew, the problem multiplied and the brethren responded favorably (Acts 4:34-37). Eventually the local church was organized to handle the growing problem (Acts 6:1-6). A famine in 43 A.D. (Acts 11:27-30) complicated the situation. Sustained periods of persecution, sharing and blockades left the saints generally poor. In 58 A.D., when Paul made his journey to Jerusalem following his *third* missionary journey, he accompanied contributions from the churches of Macedonia, Achaia, Asia and Galatia to Jerusalem to relieve the physical needs of the poor Jerusalem saints (Rom.15:26; 1 Cor.16:1-2; 2 Cor.8 & 9).

In all cases, the local church assumed full responsibility for their own work. The church at Jerusalem organized to do its own work (Acts 6:1-6). The other churches, as the need arose, accepted full responsibility for the work planned and controlled their own work. They were charged with collection (1 Cor.16:1-2; 2 Cor.8:11; 9:5) and delivery of their gifts (Acts 11:30; 1 Cor.16:3-4; 2 Cor.8:18-23) until they reached their destination (Acts 11:30). Such principles are not revealed in Scripture for nought. They establish acceptable precedents that must be applied. For congregations to ignore approved procedures in favor of

techniques which surrender the autonomy of the local church is to walk a dangerous path.

Congregations may relieve the physical necessities of saints as they temporarily arise (Acts 6:1-6) and, for those who qualify, the congregation may enroll them for permanent assistance (1 Tim.5:9-16). Each congregation must work within the framework of its own organization and ability. If ability fails, other churches may assist. How congregations fulfill their responsibilities in these areas is not revealed except that, when sending assistance to other churches, it is to be sent *directly* to the needy church. The sponsoring church and institutional arrangements are out of harmony with these approved precedents for congregational activity.

Congregational Discipline

Disciplining the disorderly is also a congregational work (2 Thess.3:6). The church at Ephesus was commended by the Lord for practicing discipline (Rev.2:1-6) while the churches at Pergamos and Thyratira were condemned for not practicing it (Rev.2:12-29). Sin allowed to persist will destroy a church (1 Cor.5:6).

Disciplining wayward saints first involves the individual Christian in an attempt to restore the lost brother (Matt.18:15-16; Gal.6:1). When circumstances demand it, congregational action is required (Matt.18:17). Those who sin are to be rebuked before all (1 Tim.5:20). The disorderly (2 Thess.3:6), immoral (1 Cor.5:1-5,9-11), factious (Tit.3:10), and false teachers (Rom.16:17-18; 1 Tim.6:3-5; Rev.2:1-6) are to be disciplined. Disciplinary action is to be taken when the church assembles (1 Cor.5:4), and members of the congregation are to uphold and support this action daily that the erring might be saved (1 Cor.5:5,9-11; 2 Thess.3:14-15; 2 Jno.9-11). Many congregations and individual Christians are failing in their duty toward erring brethren for which each shall give account to God (Rev.2:12-29).

Congregational Worship

Assembling for worship on the first day of

the week so the local membership may do together the things commanded to be done together as worship is also a function of the local church (Acts 20:7). Christians are exhorted not to miss this assembling (Heb.10:25) when the whole church comes together (1 Cor.14:23). Each member contributes their part in offering a united voice of praise around God's throne in fulfillment of this commanded function of the local church.

Conclusion

Jesus died on the cross to purify unto Himself a peculiar people zealous of the good works God ordained and revealed (Tit.2:14; Eph.2:10; 2 Tim.3:16-17). This work is performed in two ways; *viz.*, individually and congregationally. To please God Christians must actively follow every good work, and congregations must likewise fulfill the limited work required. For these works all of us shall stand before God to be judged and rewarded accordingly. Therefore, it should behoove all of us to *"serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire"* (Heb.12:28-29).☪