

“As I Have Given Orders to the Churches”

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. There are two distinctions that must be understood in order to apply the teaching of the New Testament for the Lord’s Church:
 - 1. Between the church universal and local churches
 - a. The church universal consists of all Christians in all places and at all times
 - b. Local congregations are gatherings of Christians committedly and collectively serve the Lord’s will in a single location
 - 2. Between individual and collective works
 - a. Individual works are works that are to be done by Christians working alone; context will specify
 - b. Collective works are works to be done by Christians working together as a local congregation
- B. The church universal has no earthly organization in which to do its work; what work it does is done as individuals who live and work in the world
 - 1. The church local has organization and is the only organization among Christians authorized to do collective work
 - 2. Consider the work of the church

I. EVANGELISM: PREACHING THE GOSPEL

- A. This is the primary work of the church, because it is the purpose for which the church was built
 - 1. 1Tim. 3:15; Eph. 3:8-11
- B. The early churches were active in evangelism - Acts 13:1-3; 2Cor. 11:8-9
- C. The Lord requires this - Matt. 28:19-20; 1Peter 2:9-10

II. EDIFICATION: PREPARING THE SAINTS FOR SERVICE

- A. Implied by its organization - Acts 20:28; 1Peter 5:1-2
- B. Worship is designed to edify - Col. 3:16
 - 1. Preaching, teaching, prayers, communion, offering all edify
- C. Explicitly stated in the scriptures - Eph. 4:11-16

III. BENEVOLENCE: PROVIDING FOR NEEDY SAINTS

- A. This is neither the primary, nor the secondary work of the church
 - 1. For years this has been taught as the third work of the church
 - 2. In practice, it is an occasional adjunct of the second work of the church, edification
 - 3. In reality according to examples in the New Testament, it is a limited manifestation of fellowship in a local church
- B. The early church cared for its members
 - 1. The church at Jerusalem - Acts 4:32-35
 - 2. The church at Antioch - Acts 11:27-30
 - 3. The churches of Macedonia and Achaia toward brethren in Jerusalem
 - a. Rom. 15:25-26

- C. Its organization and worship accommodated this work
 - 1. Deacons were appointed - Phil. 1:1; 1Tim 3:8-13
 - 2. They served the congregation in this area - Acts 6:1-6
 - 3. The collection for needy saints was part of the weekly assembly
 - a. 1Cor. 16:1-2
- D. Limitations to benevolence
 - 1. 1Tim. 5:9-16
 - 2. Examples of church benevolence are limited to needy saints
 - a. In every case of church benevolence where money was taken from the church treasury, the recipients were believers in need
 - b. Rom. 15:25-26; 1Cor. 16:1; 2Cor. 8:1-4, 9:1
- E. Individually, Christians are expected to be "good Samaritans" and help those in the world as they have opportunity and ability.
 - 1. James 1:26-27; Gal. 6:10
 - 2. This implies that the local church was not intended to be a social agency to satisfy all of the physical needs in the world.
 - 3. It has neither the organization nor resources to do so

Conclusion:

- A. The church has the all important work of spreading the gospel; it is not equipped or designed to do anything else
- B. "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:21)