

The Work of the Church That Jesus Built

(by Bob Pulliam)

A very important distinguishing attribute of the first century church was its work. Today, there isn't much of anything that churches don't get involved in. But that was not true of the first century church. There can be no doubt that there are many good and noble causes in this world; but the nobility of a cause does not authorize the church to get involved with it. Noble causes could have been found in the first century as well, but the church confined itself to three areas of work.

The Work of the Local Church...

When all of the New Testament is considered, there are only three areas in which the church has authority to act. These are understood by an application of scriptural *authority*, which you might want to consult if you have not already.

Evangelism...

Evangelism is, "taking the good news to the lost, or preaching the gospel." The church engages in evangelism by supporting men who are sound in the faith, or engaging in its proclamation during worship. For example, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to preach (Acts 11:19 - 22). The church in Philippi sent support to Paul that he might preach (Phil 4:14 - 18); and Paul received support from other churches that he might preach to the Corinthians (II Cor 11:8).

Edification...

Edification is, "a building up spiritually". We might think of evangelism as teaching directed outwardly, toward the world; and edification as teaching directed inwardly, toward the church. The first century church was edified by the use of spiritual gifts (I Cor 14:26), which taught the word of God initially (I Cor 2:9 - 14). God made abundant provision for this (Eph 4:11 - 16). Those gifts provided the revelation which we now have in our New Testament. The Bible is the means used today for building up Christ's body.

Benevolence...

Benevolence is, "the act of doing good to care for the necessities of others." There are a great many examples of benevolence in the scriptures:

-Right after the church was established, there was a sharing and sacrifice apparent in the church (Acts 4:32 - 37; 6:1 - 7).

-Years later, prophesy of a famine prompted the church in Antioch to send relief to the brethren in Judea (Acts 11:27ff).

-Paul wrote a great deal to the Corinthians about the collection for needy saints (II Cor 8 & 9).

Conclusion...

The church has three areas in which it is authorized to work. These are evangelism, benevolence, and edification. Nowhere can we see the first century church working in any other endeavors. If we were looking for that church Jesus built today, would we expect it to be any different in work than what we read of in scripture?