

Discipleship Questions

What are the three dimensions of work accomplished by the New Testament church?

How does the New Testament distinguish between the work done by an individual and the work done by a local church?

What does the local church accomplish whenever it assembles?

How does the church get involved in sending preachers?

What is the church's responsibility concerning those who preach the word?

What does the church accomplish through supporting preachers?

How does the local church get money to do its work?

What work does the church accomplish in supporting the needy?

The Work Of The New Testament Church

Those who are part of Jesus's church have work to accomplish for Him. The work of God's church is accomplished both through individual efforts and through the collective efforts of the local church. This lesson will focus on the pattern God has given the local church through its collective efforts. This pattern has three dimensions: Upward, inward, and outward.

1 Timothy 5:3-16

This passage distinguishes between the individuals who make up Jesus's church and the church acting collectively. There are many works Jesus wants concerning individual Christians (e.g. working to provide for their families, helping those in need, showing hospitality, loving husband/wife, children, neighbors, etc.). Yet, this text shows the collective responsibility of the local church is more limited (i.e. how it uses its resources, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The local church's responsibility of regularly providing financial care for Christian widows was limited to widows in genuine need. This is defined as Christian widows at least 60 years old, who meet the qualifications given, and have no family caring for them. However, a Christian has the broader work of repaying parents and grandparents outside these limitations for the church. Therefore, we must distinguish between things the individual Christian is responsible for (e.g. Galatians 6:10; James 1:26-27) and things the church is responsible for collectively.

Acts 14:26-28

The local church consists of every member of that church and exists whenever it is both unassembled (Acts 8:1-3) and assembled (Hebrews 10:25). However, there are specific things the local church is expected to do collectively. For example, a law-making body (e.g. U.S. Senate) consists of individual lawmakers who may have many individual responsibilities, but only have authority to make laws when they act collectively. One of the things local churches are expected to do is to gather in one place at designated times (Acts 20:7). New Testament churches assembled in various places (Acts 2:46; 19:8-10; 20:7; Philemon 1:2). These assemblies would have an upward component by offering worship to God (Ephesians 5:19), an inward component of spiritually building up the Christians who had assembled (1 Corinthians 14:26), and an outward component if there were unbelievers present (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Romans 10:13-18

People must call on the name of the Lord to be saved (Acts 2:21, 38; 22:16), but cannot do so without a preacher helping them hear about and believe in Him. This demonstrates the critical nature of Christians to preach to others (an outward-focused work to spread the good news of salvation in Jesus). This passage, though, goes another step to say that someone cannot preach without being sent. There is one sense in which God has commissioned all people in His church to go and preach the gospel (1 Peter 3:14-16; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Matthew 28:18-20). Both Christians (acting individually) and local churches (acting collectively) can be seen in the New Testament as ringing God's word out for the lost to hear (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Local churches specifically sent men to preach the gospel by sending them on a mission to preach and/or by sending financial support to help accomplish their work of preaching (Acts 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:15-17). Note that we never see any indication of a church sending money to an organization for preaching (missionary society, preaching school, etc.) or sending money to another church that "sponsors" other preaching work.

1 Corinthians 9:3-14

The church is responsible for providing physical/financial compensation for those who preach God's word. In the New Testament, this care could be given in two ways. First, it could be given by individual Christians (Galatians 6:6; Luke 10:1-12). Second, it could be given by a local church collectively (1 Corinthians 9:3-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). This support was also not just limited to the local church where the preaching was taking place but could be supplied by other churches sending support to one who preaches (2 Corinthians 11:8). Through this support of those teaching the gospel, the church helps God's word spread to those who have never heard (outward) and helps Christians grow in the faith (inward). Evangelists, shepherds, and teachers can all share in the work of preaching and teaching (Ephesians 4:11-16; Acts 20:25-32; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 5:12-14).

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Churches in the New Testament were commanded to take up a collection on the first day of the week. The free-will offering of the members is the only way you see New Testament churches getting money to do their God-given work. Particularly, this passage demonstrates this money being used to help needy saints (Christians) in Jerusalem. Although individual Christians can help anyone (Galatians 6:10; James 1:26-27), the local church is limited to only giving financial assistance to needy Christians (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-7; 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 8-9). Note that there is no New Testament pattern or authority for the local church to send money to organizations to care for the needs of others (e.g. hospitals, nursing facilities, orphanages, etc.).

Conclusion

God has given His church work to accomplish in carrying out His mission for them. God's church must follow this pattern today, as it pleases God and has proven itself to be effective (Colossians 1:23). Sadly, there are many churches today that have changed this work in various ways (including secular education, entertainment, recreation, church-supported institutions, general benevolence) that distract from the true mission of God's church.

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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