

# **DISCHARGING THE WORK OF THE CHURCH**

## **Ed Dye**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Ac.11:22f; 1Tim.5:16
  - a. In Ac.11:22f, the local church is discharging its work of evangelism.
  - b. In 1Tim.5:16, its work is declared to be limited – “let not the church be charged.”
2. If it is the work of the local church, the local church must do it! If it is not the work of the local church, the local church must not do it!
3. Every worthwhile thing, especially everything with which God has to do, has a purpose, a mission, or a work to perform or discharge.
4. Whether it be the family relationship (the home), Noah’s Ark, Law of Moses, John the Baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord’s Supper, or the local church, it has a mission, a work to discharge, or a divine purpose.
5. A church without a divine mission or work to discharge is a church without Christ. Also, one which does not discharge her divine work is without Christ. If she attempts to add to or take from or substitute for her divine mission, she stands condemned by the word of God.
6. All men would have a greater appreciation for the church if they understood her true mission on the earth and the extent of (or the limits of) her work she is to discharge.
  - a. If men understood what the church is to do, they would not criticize her for refusing to do a work which she is not authorized by divine authority.
  - b. If men, including some members of the church, fully understood what the work of the local church is and the limits of it, they would not try to prostitute the local church to the ways of man; they would not allow her to be engaged in such things; they would not criticize those who refuse to allow her to be so engaged.
7. Definition of terms:
  - a. “Church” – a local congregation of Christians – baptized believers – working as a unit or acting collective, not just as an individual or Christians working as individuals.
  - b. “Discharge” – to relieve of or release from, such as firing an employee, or release from the armed services; also, to perform as a duty – the latter is its meaning in our present study.

- c. “Work” – indicates her divine mission. What God has ordained as her work. One may do something not divinely authorized to do, but not with God’s approval!
- 8. It is inconceivable that the Lord would establish the church and not give her a work to perform, or give her a work to perform without giving clear revelation or instructions as to what that work is.
- 9. It is also reasonable to assume that God would show by divine revelation how she discharged the work he authorized her to do.
- 10. Thus the importance of this study. It is “to the law and to the testimony” we go to learn about the local church discharging her work.
- 11. Remember: We are talking about a divine institution with a divine mission to be discharged in accordance with divine regulation!

## **II. DISCUSSION**

### **A. FIRST, LET US DETERMINE THE DIVINE MISSION OR WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.**

- 1. Viewed negatively.
  - a. The mission of the local church is not social or political or to give its members social prestige or political power.
    - (1) Christianity is not primarily for social betterment.
      - (a) The gospel of Christ is not a “social gospel,” with a this world attitude and message.
      - (b) The Lord’s church is not a “social institution,” not a political organization.
    - (2) While the gospel, with its principles of everlasting truth, will work social reform, it does so by reforming the individual’s manner of living and thinking.
    - (3) Christianity did not undertake social reform or social guidance in the N.T. age. And the local church did not become a social institution or the center of or for social activity. It did not wage a civil rights campaign for social reformation or social equality.
    - (4) The Bible teaches that if Christianity finds a man either a slave or a master, it is to make a better one out of him, 1Cor.7:20-22; Eph.6:5-9; Col.3:22-25; 4:1.
      - (a) While the principles of the gospel at work in the lives of men may result in the abolition of slavery and social inequality, there is no authority for the local church to lead in social

rebellion, political revolution, and civil disobedience.

- (5) The Bible teaches that the home is to be the center of social activity for individuals, not the local church, 1Cor.11:20-22.
    - (a) But even the home must not preach civil disobedience.
  - (6) The increasing tendency to socialize local church services and local church work by having “fellowship dinners,” a social hour with refreshments after the services for various groups, a church dining room to entertain visitors and accommodate social functions is purely sectarian and leads directly to what Paul condemned upon the part of the Corinthians in 1Cor.11.
  - (7) Certainly, there is good to be derived from Christians associating and eating together, but it should be kept on the basis of home and individual Christian activity and not local church activity.
- b. It is not the work of the local church to provide and serve as guide in recreational activity.
- (1) If you seek a religious connection that will satisfy your desire for church parties, etc., then go to the denominations, not the church of our Lord.
  - (2) Fellowship halls and church ball teams and family life centers are no more scriptural than instrumental music, faith only, or sprinkling for baptism.
- c. Making money is not the function of the local church even if it is only to support her own work.
- (1) The church has no business in secular business, whether it be merchandising, manufacturing, farming, rental property, or any other economic endeavor.
  - (2) All legitimate business should be kept in the field of individual enterprise.
  - (3) God gave a pattern for raising the funds by which the church operates and does its work. That pattern is found in 1Cor.16:1,2, and we should respect it by believing it wholeheartedly and practicing it scrupulously.

- d. It is not the work of one local church to act as a collecting agency for other local churches or human institutions, such as Sponsoring Churches, Benevolent Societies (better known as orphan homes or widows homes), or Missionary Societies, Colleges, etc.
  - e. It is not the work of the local church to operate or to support the operation of secular schools, whether kindergartens, or colleges.
    - (1) Let those stay in the secular field and be operated and supported by individuals, or by the state or the federal government.
  - f. How do we know such things are not the work of the local church?
    - (1) Because we can't read about it in the Scriptures, or find scriptural authority for it.
    - (2) Remember: If it is scriptural, it will be found authorized in the scriptures by book, chapter and verse, either by precept, approved example, or necessary implication!
  - g. What makes brethren add to the work of the local church while condemning the Denominations for adding to the worship and the organization of the church? (Good question!)
2. Viewed positively.
- a. Such things are not within the mission or work of the local church because it is a spiritual institution, not a secular one!
  - b. The mission of the local church is set forth in many passages (to be noted later), and is composed of: evangelism, edification, and benevolence, which is the **SUM TOTAL** of its work.
  - c. Its evangelism extends to all men as far as opportunity and ability will allow; its work of edification extends to all its members; its work of benevolence extends to needy saints.
  - d. The local church, as such, is not required to carry on **general works of benevolence** among people of the world, nor could she feed all the hungry of the world if she tried, even State and Federal resources can't do that!

3. If it is not the work of the local church, then the local church must not be engaged in it, must not provide or support it with its money. “Let not the church be charged.”
4. If it is not the work of the local church, then the local church has not business providing facilities for it; let the church be the church; let the church do the work of the church.

**B. TO BETTER UNDERSTAND, WE WILL TAKE A LOOK AT THE WORK OF THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN CONTRASTED.**

1. Church action and individual action are not identical!
  - a. Works of the local church and works of the individual Christian may overlap, or include some of the same things; but there is a divine distinction between them which proves they are not identical, Mt.18:15-17; 1Cor.5; Eph.6:4; Jno.13:14; Rom.16:16a; 1Tim.5:10,16.
  - b. Individuals may wear the name “Christian,” Ac.11:26; 26:28; 1Pet.4:16; Jas.2:7 – But the church can’t; the name it wears must honor Christ, not the individuals who make up the church belonging to Christ.
  - c. Individuals may operate commercially, Ac.16:14; 18:1-3 - - not so with the local church.
  - d. The work of the local church is supported by individual contributions, 1Cor.16:1,2 – not by collective action in operating businesses, etc.
2. Local church work is collective responsibility, not individual.
  - a. For instance: Individual contribution, but collective distribution and oversight, 1Cor.16:1,2; 2Cor.8,9; Ac.11:27-30; 20:28; 1Pet.5:1-3; 1Th.5:12,13; Heb.13:17.
  - b. An individual or private home or hospital or transportation agency or construction company, etc., may be hired to work or act for the local church, and often is – cite examples.
    - (1) If local church pays – it is church’s work.
    - (2) If individual or home, etc., finances the work, not church work.
    - (3) The local church can relieve the needy for whom it is responsible only by furnishing or paying some one to work or act for it, Ac.6; 1Tim.5:16.
    - (4) The church preaches the gospel in the same way.

- (5) Its edification work is done the same way. Cf. Bible classes – some one is chosen by the church to do the teaching, etc.

**C. NOW TAKE NOTE OF HOW APOSTOLIC CHURCHES FUNCTIONED.**

1. In the field of evangelism:
  - a. There was individual action, Ac.8:4; 11:19-21.
  - b. But also collective (local church) action, Ac.11:22-26; Phil.4:15,16; 2Cor.11:8.
  - c. This action was congregation in nature and scope, not universal church action.
    - (1) The church universal is not a functioning agency with an assigned work.
    - (2) The local church's work of evangelism is never to be discharged through a central agency of any kind – neither a Sponsoring church nor a Missionary Society.
2. In the field of edification:
  - a. There was individual action, Rom.14:19; 15:2.
  - b. But also local church action, Eph.4:11-16; Ac.20:17,28-32; 1Pet.5:1-3; Heb.13:17; 1Th.5:12,13.
  - c. Again, the action was congregational, not universal.
    - (1) This work was not discharged by building and maintaining an Edification Society, a separate human organization through which to do the work, with the local churches supplying the funds.
    - (2) Contrast Bible classes conducted by the local church and a Sunday School Society.
    - (3) Ill. by a centralized Sunday School under a board of directors.
3. In the field of benevolence – relieving the needy.
  - a. There was individual action, Eph.4:28; 1Jno.3:17; Jas.2:14-16; 1Tim.5:8f.
  - b. Also, there was local church action, Ac.6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom.15:25,26; 1Cor.16:1-3.
  - c. Again, it was congregational, not universal. It was not discharged through a Benevolent Society under a Board, or a Sponsoring church.

**III. CONCLUSION**

1. The local churches discharged their work for almost two centuries as all-sufficient organizations.
2. To transfer their work to some centralized arrangement, or some kind of federation of churches, or to a human organization reflects on the wisdom of God; it is without divine authority; therefore, it is sinful!
3. But do we have such things among us? Yes! Proof?
  - a. Some churches of Christ operate secular schools from kindergarten up.
  - b. Some individuals or human organizations operate secular schools from kindergarten to college level supported by both individuals and churches of Christ.
  - c. Read the charter of the Southern Christian Home as proof that we have Benevolent Societies among us.

-- Edgar J. Dye