

3 Unique Features of the N.T. Church

Their Work

Introduction:

1. In two previous lessons we have addressed the subject “Unique Features of the N.T. Church.”
 - a. In the first lesson we talked about their loyalty, as an explanation of why they were unique (different from most modern religious organizations).
 - b. In the second lesson we discussed their worship. We observed that their worship was founded on their loyalty, sprang from their gratitude and resulted from their renewed minds. From Rom. 12:1-2 we learned that their worship consisted of lives given to God. We also noted that their worship expressed itself in various actions, including five acts (singing, praying, studying, giving and observing the Lord’s Supper) but that their worship was much broader than that and was certainly not limited to actions done when they were in assemblies such as this.
2. In this study I want to talk to you about their work.
3. But before we do that I want to note with you some assumptions that this lesson makes.
 - a. It assumes that we are interested in doing what they did.
 - b. It assumes that we are committed to what they were committed to.
 - c. It assumes that we are confident in the way they did things as the way God wants us to do them.
4. If you do not make these assumptions this lesson may not mean very much more to you than an academic exercise in the history of what the N.T. church did and how they did it. If, however, you make these assumptions, this lesson takes on practical significance. It helps us to define what we are supposed to be doing and tells us how God wants us to do it.

Discussion:

- I. From the very earliest history of the church it is evident that they perceived they had a very definite work to do. Let’s look at some of the evidence.
 - A. From first two recorded sermons it is evident that preaching the gospel was top priority (Acts 2; 3).
 1. It was not the speaking in tongues, but this validated the Holy Spirit’s involvement in the preaching.
 2. It was not the healing of the lame man, but this did validate the power of Jesus to forgive sins.
 3. The preaching of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, faith in Him, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins.
 4. Consistent with the commission given by Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 24:46-47).
 - B. But, one might reason that “these were the apostles. This was a work that the Lord gave to them. It was not a universal work for the church for all time to come.”

1. That seems a reasonable argument.
 2. Yet those who were not numbered among the 12 picked up this work and went about to accomplish it also.
 - a. Stephen (Acts 7). Evidenced that he first gave himself to the Lord by giving himself to death for his preaching (Acts 7:54ff).
 - b. When persecution was initiated the Christians scattered preaching the word wherever they went (Acts 8:4).
 - c. Philip is a notable example of this (Acts 8:5ff). Went to Samaria, and to the Ethiopian.
 3. That congregations picked up on this work is evidenced.
 - a. At Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:8)
 - b. At Philippi (Phil. 4:10-20).
 4. This was a work validated by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13) and involved both the instruction of those who were not Christians and those who were.
 - a. Non-Christians. Paul's first preaching trip was to non-Christians (Acts 13).
 - b. Christians. At Jerusalem (Acts 2:42). At Antioch (Acts 11:19ff). Paul's work in Antioch following the first preaching trip (Acts 15:35). The second preaching trip was made to brethren in the cities of the first preaching trip (Acts 15:36ff).
- C. There is a secondary and supporting work that they participated in from the earliest part of their history.
1. They shared their property and possessions with one another as any might have need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32ff).
 2. Evidenced itself in the care of their widows (Acts 6:1ff). Not limited to the church at Jerusalem (1 Tim. 5:3ff).
 3. The church at Antioch determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea (Acts 11:27-30).
 4. The epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians indicate this kind of thing was a widespread practice (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8 and 9).
 5. There were some restrictions on this work.
 - a. In caring for the needy there was a primary and secondary level of responsibility.
 - 1) First and primary responsibility belonged to the family (1 Tim. 5:3).
 - 2) Second line of responsibility was the church (1 Tim. 5:16).
 - b. The church's responsibility was limited to those who were Christians.
 - 1) Acts 2:44-45—the believers had all things in common.
 - 2) Acts 4:32-35—there were no needy persons among them.
 - 3) The collection of 1 Cor. 16:1-2 was for God's people.
 - 4) In Rom. 15:25 Paul said he was on his way serving the saints. Verse 26 says that Macedonia and Achaia had made a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.
 - c. Were these people unconcerned about the poor among the non-Christians? I don't think so. Perhaps they gave money to other organizations for this purpose, but when they collected as a church it was for God's people. This is consistent with the family priority evidenced earlier.
 - d. Some seem to look at the first day of the week contribution as a source of

FREE money.

II. The financial side summarized visually.

HOW FUNDS
WERE COLLECTED

WHAT THEY
WERE EXPENDED ON

III. Things we do not read in Scripture.

- A. The church collecting funds through engagement in business.
 - 1. Individual Christians engaged in business and gave.
 - 2. It was a matter founded on individuals being loyally committed to God's work. It was very personal.
- B. Churches spending first day of the week contributions on recreation, social affairs.
 - 1. Doesn't mean that the people were antisocial.
 - 2. Evidence is that they were.
 - 3. But they were narrowly focused on the work. They were God-focused rather than self-focused.
- C. Churches focused on general benevolence, improving social situations, improving economic and physical health of people.
 - 1. Not that they were unconcerned about such.
 - 2. But they saw these changes as by-products of people having given their hearts to the Lord.
- D. "Well I don't agree with that." "I think good attract people to the gospel."
They do. If your priorty is on social change, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing clean water, and preaching the gospel is not the top priority what have you taught people? Why do people call churches for help with their electric bill? What is their perception of the work of the church? Certainly not to preach the gospel.

Conclusion:

1. Let's get our focus clear.
2. Let's understand what the work of the church is.
3. Let's move on it.