

SO WHAT DOES THE BODY DO?

Having now explained in detail the need for one church and the way of entry into that one church, a student might now ask the above question. We know from previous study that Christ saves those in the church but isn't there more to it? Shouldn't the members of that body be doing something? The obvious answer is yes.

There are very broad areas in which the body is to operate and function. Every activity of the church can be placed into one of these categories. Inasmuch as the church belongs to Christ and it is He who sets the standards, we must not deviate from clear Bible teaching. We will examine three of those areas today. Next week we intend to discuss the fourth: Worship.

Evangelism is a duty of the Lord's church. Jesus Himself said so and gave us numerous examples of His own teaching and preaching. The entire responsibility for evangelism rests with the church. Not another single soul will be saved from eternal damnation without the work of evangelism in the local congregation. Not a single member of the Godhead will do the work of evangelism for us. Consider the Damascus road conversion of Saul. When the light shone roundabout Saul and the Lord appeared to Him (Acts 9:1-19; 1 Corinthians 15:8) he was not told what to do to be saved. In fact, the Lord instructed Saul to continue into Damascus and await instructions from a mortal man, Ananias, who would tell him what he *must* do (Acts 9:6). When Ananias balked at going and teaching Saul because of his dangerous reputation, the Lord told Ananias that Saul was a "*chosen vessel of Mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel*" (Acts 9:15). On two occasions in the same chapter the Lord declines to teach the Gospel and instead gives the task to His servants. As our Lord ascended this earth and returned to Heaven, His final comments were: "*Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*" (Matthew 28:19). When the early church was persecuted and the Christians fled for their lives the Bible says that wherever they went, they went preaching and teaching (Acts 8:4). The church must evangelize.

Edification is similar to evangelism except that it refers to building up and encouraging those who are members of the body. One of the key passages on this subject is found in Hebrews 10 where the writer says: "*Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another and so much the more as ye see the day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:24,25). Paul was given to encouragement and edification (Acts 11:23; 14:22; 20:2). He tells the church at Thessalonica to edify one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11) and he also instructed Timothy to make exhortation a part of his ministry (2 Timothy 4:2). We work to encourage and build-up each other.

Benevolence is part of what the body does. In Acts 2, immediately following the establishment of the church on Pentecost, the Bible records great acts of benevolence: "*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need*" (Acts 2:44,45). Later, Paul would lead a collection for the saints in distress in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Here we have brothers and sisters helping brothers and sisters. In Galatians 6:10 Paul again emphasizes that we help all people: "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*"

Benevolence, like evangelism and edification were and are hallmarks of a biblically sound church. One ignore one of these and claim the body to be after the pattern of the first century church. There is at least as much in the way of commands, examples and inferences for these three areas as for any other practice found in the church today. If we affirm as Paul that Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20) then we must seek to evangelize, edify and provide for one another and for those outside the body too.

The church also assembles together to worship the Father. In our time together next week, we will examine worship and try to see what is desired by God. It will be an important study of a topic that is grossly misunderstood today.

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NEXT WEEK: WORSHIP