

The Manifold Wisdom Of God

Introduction. In Jesus Christ, we have the fullness of the Godhead summed up (Colossians 2:9). Jesus is able to supply every spiritual need of man. The church is the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 1:15-23) and is made up of those who have been “called out” of the world by the gospel of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:14). The citizens of the kingdom of Christ have assembled themselves under His authority to do His will. God in His infinite wisdom (Ephesians 1:8; 3:10-11) designed the local church whereby Christians can grow and help one another. The local church, though not replacing the individual disciple, is an integral part of accomplishing God’s work.

I. The Local Church And Evangelism

- A. The continuing reality of sin (Romans 3:9, 19, 23) impresses us that the gospel, God’s power to save, is still needed (Romans 1:16-17). How will lost people be saved except through the gospel?
- B. The parable of the sower is about a sower, not just the hearers (Matthew 13:1-20; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). This is a basic lesson about His kingdom: its establishment and growth would be accomplished through teaching.
- C. Evangelism is about drawing people to the Father through hearing, learning, and coming (John 6:44-45). Hearing implies teaching, sound substance, and listening. Learning implies understanding and application. When combined with the good and honest heart, people are drawn to God.
- D. These and other pertinent passages, taken cumulatively, help us to understand the commission in Matthew 28:19. From the beginning of His ministry to its very end, Jesus emphasized teaching — by man to man — for His kingdom to grow and thrive.
- E. In light of this, what can congregations do to accomplish this work? The list is endless of the works churches can do in scriptural methods to teach the lost:
 1. Correspondence courses.
 2. Recordings of sermons on specific/requested subjects.
 3. Various tracts which can be distributed.
 4. Theme-specific gospel meetings with day services during gospel meetings.
 5. Using the local preacher for an evangelistic meeting (visitors from a community would be more likely to hear the preacher who lives in their area).
 6. Targeting a specific area of a community for work (Acts 1:8).
 7. Sending a preacher to an area to evangelize (Acts 11:22).
 8. Supporting men to travel various places to preach (Philippians 1:3-7; 2 Corinthians 11:8).
 9. Utilizing the Internet for websites and social media.
- F. When we see the unimpressive results of our evangelism efforts, remember that are responsible to God to teach, not for the results (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

II. The Local Church And Edification

- A. An equally-important task for local churches is the edification of Christians. This is the combination of time, teaching, and application to bring babes in Christ to

spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 5:12-14). It is just as much a part of Jesus' commission as evangelism (Matthew 28:20).

- B. Jerusalem and Antioch are good examples of how churches can accomplish their work of edification, and the good results that come from this important work.
 - 1. Acts 2:42 gives insight as to how Christians can be brought to spiritual maturity: (1) continuing steadfastly in apostolic doctrine; (2) fellowship; (3) breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper); and, (4) prayer.
 - 2. The church at Antioch served as an important training ground. They received faithful men, Barnabas and Saul, who gave encouragement and needed instruction (11:23-26). Antioch saw the need to train John Mark (Barnabas' cousin), did the work necessary to train him, were of sacrificial spirits who were willing to endure the "less than mature" efforts of a young person in training, and were patient while the growth occurred (12:25-13:5). They gathered to hear of the spread of the gospel in other places (14:26-28). They did not ignore doctrinal and practical problems that arose (Acts 15:1-3). As a result of the Holy Spirit's decision in Jerusalem (v. 28), the disciples in Antioch rejoiced, were encouraged, and strengthened in the Lord (vv. 30-32).
- C. The following are some specific suggestions to bring saints to maturity:
 - 1. Decent and orderly worship services, designed to bring the creature to the Creator, are absolutely vital.
 - 2. Organized and balanced Bible-class curriculums are of great impact.
 - 3. Gospel meetings can be targeted to the needs of members.
 - 4. Corrective discipline, though unpleasant, is done to save the sinner and keep the local church pure (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:7-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14; Titus 3:10-11; Ephesians 5:25-27).
 - 5. Teach and train outside of regular Bible classes and assemblies. This could include older men teaching younger men, older women teaching younger women, or general open classes with specific topics.
 - 6. Keep track of brethren. This involves dealings with Christians on all levels — the weak, sick, broken, driven away, and lost (Ezekiel 34:1-6). When mature brethren check on the weaker brethren who are involved in sin or inexplicably miss worship services, they are trying to help them and not drive them away.

III. The Local Church And Benevolence

- A. The Bible unquestionably teaches that we are to be concerned about and assist our fellow-men with their needs. But do local churches, as such, have a responsibility in this area? Yes!
- B. Several passages show local churches at work in benevolence. The church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-6), the church at Antioch (Acts 11:27-30), the church at Corinth and the churches of Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9), the churches of Macedonia and Achaia (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8-9), and the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 3:14-15; 5:16) were active in or instructed about benevolent actions. However, we must note some specifics about the cases cited here:
 - 1. The needs were created by circumstances beyond the control of those involved (Acts 2:1-5, 42-47; 4:32, 35; 6:1; 11:28; Romans 15:26; 1

- Corinthians 16:1, 3; 2 Corinthians 8:3, 14; 9:1, 12). These were not situations were someone imagined or created a need for others to fulfill.
2. The purpose of this benevolence was to satisfy basic necessities of life, not to enrich others monetarily or supply frivolous wants (Acts 2:45; 4:35; 6:1; 11:29-30; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; 9:12).
 3. This benevolence was to Christians. Local churches were not the “Apostolic Times Red Cross” for the world (Acts 2:45; 4:32; 6:1; 11:29; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1, 12).
- C. Local churches accomplished this work without any type of outside organization to assist them. The church, as God designed it, is fully sufficient to do its work (Ephesians 4:11-16).
- D. In 1 Timothy 5:1-16, family members are given primary responsibility to care for their needy widows (vv. 4, 8, 16). While there may be times when Christians have temporary needs, there is a limitation placed on churches in this text to those who are “widows indeed” (vs. 16). Long-term or permanent assistance can be given only under certain circumstances (vv. 9-10). This way, churches are not burdened with those who are not their responsibility so they can meet the needs of those who are their responsibility. If a local church can be burdened by caring for people not its responsibility, then it can be burdened by work that is not its responsibility (1 Timothy 5:16).
- E. Individual Christians have the responsibility to see to the needs of others (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27). The collective work of local churches, however, while including benevolence, is not primarily benevolence (Acts 6:2, 4, 7). Benevolence by local churches is to be done only within the parameters established by the New Testament. To do otherwise is to devalue the focus, efforts, and resources of local churches for less nobler purposes.

Conclusion. Because it is God’s arrangement, local churches have a vital part in accomplishing God’s work. Local churches, when properly instructed and motivated, can do much to teach the gospel to the lost, bring saints to perfection (maturity), and help brethren in need. Let us not waste our time, work and resources on activities, regardless of how noble they might seem, that are not our responsibility. Be about your Father’s business (Luke 2:49). If you can accomplish that, you will have little time to focus on anything else.