

MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

It is recognized by all Bible readers that God has a church in the world, and all agree that the saved man is a part of the great family of God, a member of what some call the universal church. However, in New Testament times the local congregation was the unit of action. Each congregation was a separate and distinct organization (Acts 14:23). There was no ecclesiastic-ism through which the churches worked. They believed in the Lord and had the same aims and purposes, but neither had any jurisdiction over the other, and they erected no ecclesiasticisms over their heads. The Lord Jesus was head over the church (Eph. 1:22), and to him they bowed (Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 3:14).

MISSION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH. God intended that the church should be an active agency in carrying out his purposes in the world. It seems that all activities of the church as such may be included under three headings—namely, converting sinners, edifying itself, helping the needy.

1. CONVERTING SINNERS. In discussing this phase of the church's activity, it is not necessary to make the usual distinction between home and foreign missions. With the Lord, the "field is the world" (Matt. 13:38).

NATURAL ORDER. There is a natural order. A Christian's first interest is in his own family, then his neighbors, and to the "uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In this instance the natural is the scriptural order. It is every Christian's duty and privilege to teach people and convert sinners. God intends that every child of his shall so study as to become, in a reasonable length of time, able to teach others. "For when by reason of time ye ought to be teachers, ye

have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5: 12). But the magnitude of the work demands the whole church put forth a united effort.

JERUSALEM CHURCH. When the church in Jerusalem was scattered (Acts 8), every one did what he could on his own resources, under the providence of God, to preach the gospel and plant churches. It seems that some soon returned to Jerusalem or others were converted, for we soon read again of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-31). This church sent out Barnabas on a special mission to Antioch (Acts 11:22-24). Being Christians, they, of course, would not require him to bear all expenses incident to the work to which they had sent him.

CHURCH AT ANTIOCH. Directed by the Holy Spirit, the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to fields of labor selected by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). After preaching in many cities, they returned to Antioch, gathered the church together, and reported their work (Acts 14:26, 27). These preachers were sent out by the church, and their reports were made to the church. When some trouble arose in the church at Antioch, as a result of Judaizing teachers, the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem about the matter, and the church in Jerusalem made reply, under the direction of the apostles, to the church in Antioch (Acts 15:1-35).

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (Acts 15:36-41). It appears that Paul and Barnabas made this trip on their own initiative. While on this trip the church in Philippi sent to the aid of Paul (Phil. 4:16). The church at Philippi was established by Paul (Acts 16), and with him they had fellowship from that time forward (Phil. 1:3-7), even when he was in prison.

THE CHURCH A CANDLESTICK. Local churches are called candlesticks (Rev. 1:20). A candlestick within

itself has no light, but it upholds and sustains that which gives light. Now, the word of God gives the light. "The opening of thy word giveth light" (Ps. 119: 130). The church as a candlestick is a striking figure. The church, a body of human beings, can generate no spiritual light, but it can hold out to the world that which does give light, the word of the living God. Let the local churches, therefore, realize their importance as candlesticks, and hold aloft the word, that those in darkness may see.

SUPPORTING THE PREACHER. In the days of the apostles many churches seemed not to realize their responsibilities, but the church in Philippi stands forth as a shining example of missionary zeal and activity. "But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me; wherein indeed ye did take thought, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me. Howbeit ye did well that ye had fellowship with my affliction. And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only; for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account. But I have all things, and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things which came from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus"

(Phil. 4:10-19). In thus commending them he plainly condemns those churches who declined to have fellowship with him in the work.

THE CHURCH, THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH. "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). Paul's statement that the church is the "pillar and ground" of the truth emphasizes the fact that the church is that which sustains and upholds the truth. A church upholds the truth by teaching it and supporting those who are preaching it.

CHURCH SUFFICIENCY. From the foregoing considerations it appears that the church is sufficient for preaching the gospel to the whole world. In fact, while church activities were under the direction of the inspired men, the church was the only body through which missionary work was done. They organized no missionary societies. There is no trace of an ecclesiasticism of any sort in the New Testament, nor of any organization of churches for missionary, or any other, purposes. If any man claims that the church as a missionary institution is not sufficient to do the necessary work of preaching the gospel, he thereby impeaches the wisdom of God.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY. It is claimed that to oppose the organization of missionary societies is to attempt to restrain our liberties in Christ. The early churches had no societies; did they have no liberties in Christ? Inspired men then organized no societies. Their actions then are proof that, if living now, they would organize none. The advocates of societies talk much of being "progressive." Do they seriously entertain the idea that the Holy Spirit has sufficiently advanced in knowledge that, if he were now inspiring men, he would lead them to organize and patronize societies? Do they

think the Holy Spirit has by this time, by the radiant light of this progressive age, made sufficient advancement in knowledge as to see the advantage of such organizations and to see that his former plans, or lack of plans, was only the result of foggy ideas he entertained in primitive times? Such thoughts are little short of blasphemy; and yet, in view of the fact that there were no societies then and the further fact that those who organize them now think they are meeting the approval of the Holy Spirit, how else do they justify themselves?

RAILROADS. When met with the argument that the apostles organized no societies, the society advocate replies: "Neither did they ride in trains, automobiles, or steamboats." Certainly not; but they did use all available means of transportation. This warrants us in doing likewise. Organizing societies has nothing to do with methods of travel. The organization that sends a missionary and the means of travel he selects are two different things. We have no controversy over the method of traveling. The society sends out a missionary, and the church sends one. Both may go to the same field in the same conveyance; but the fact stands out clear that one was sent by the church and the other by the human society, one sent by a divine institution according to apostolic example, the other sent by a man-made institution according to human wisdom. Herein lies the difference.

"THE SOCIETY ONLY A METHOD." It is argued that the society is only a method of doing the work. But the society is not a method in any sense—it is an institution. An institution organized to do a certain work and the method by which it does that work are two distinct things. And the same methods that are used by the society may be used by the church. Must the church depend, for our missionaries, on souls willing to go?

So must the society. In raising funds, must the church depend on voluntary offerings? So must the society. Missionaries from both institutions have access to the same methods of travel, and generally use them, in going to the field of labor. Missionaries from both the society and the church have access to the same method of teaching—namely, oral speech and the printed page. Both institutions have access to the same method of transmitting funds. The methods are the same; the institutions are different—one human, the other divine.

EVILS OF THE SOCIETY. Aside from the fact that societies are unscriptural, and perhaps because of that fact, a great train of evils has grown out of them. In organizing these societies there was a departure from the simplicity of New Testament teaching, and, when people depart from the law in one point, it is only a question of time till they will disregard the law in other points. A gradual departure from the New Testament is ever manifest in those who support the societies. Some, it is true, have raised their voices against the most radical, but they have accomplished little in staying the progress of departure. The spirit of departure from the law will ultimately result in open antagonism to the law.

"No thief e'er felt the halter draw
With good opinion of the law."

Many advocates of the societies have reached the point where they deny the divinity of Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures. Being conscious that the word of God was antagonistic to their course, there grew up in their hearts a feeling of antagonism to the law. The United Christian Missionary Society has sent to the mission field men who are known to favor receiving into the fellowship of the church those who have not been baptized. Mr. R. E. Elmore, a former member of the Executive Committee of the Foreign Christian

Missionary Society, which is now the United Christian Missionary Society, makes the following charges, based on the report made by John T. Brown, a member of the Executive Committee of the United Christian Missionary Society. Mr. Brown made a personal investigation on the foreign field.

CHARGES.

"1. Missionaries in the employ of the society have advocated the practice of open membership on the field, and still indorse this practice.

"2. Missionaries of the society have practiced open membership on the field, and are probably still practicing it.

"3. Missionaries of the United Society are willing to practice sprinkling for Christian baptism.

"4. One missionary, at least, of the society would sprinkle infants.

"5. Missionaries of the society practice the invention of men known as infant dedication.

"6. Missionaries of the society have churches vote on candidates for salvation.

"7. Missionaries of the society have unimmersed members elected to office on their church boards serving as elders and deacons.

"8. Missionaries of the societies practice 'probation'— that is they hold back natives from obeying the gospel and becoming members of the church some candidates remaining on the waiting list for a year or more.

"9. Missionaries of the society employ native evangelists and ministers who have not been immersed.

"10. Missionaries of the society favor the subjection of the local churches to a supergovernment, a distinct association which 'determines the management of the church for its district as to reception of members, ordination of ministers, and general oversight.'

"11. Missionaries of the society, teaching in union schools, are rationalists, concerning one of whom Dr. Alien Hutcheson says: 'He set aside everything in the Bible from God down to the virgin birth.'

"12. Missionaries of the society have practiced deception and are, therefore, unworthy of the trust of the

brotherhood."—Christian Standard, December 30, 1922, p 22.

In the Christian Standard, January 27, 1923, Z. T. Sweeney says: "There is no half-way house on the road of apostasy. When a man begins to deny the faith, he almost universally ends in a complete denial of it."

These things are known to the Board of Directors of the United Christian Missionary Society, yet they continue such missionaries on the field and call on the churches to support them. The society is not a servant of the church, but the churches have become a servant of the society. The directors of this society are amongst the leaders of the church which is pleased to style itself the "Progressive Christian Church."

No man can countenance nor support this society without becoming responsible for all the evils resulting from their departures from the truth (Rev. 2:18, 19).

SOCIETIES A CAUSE OF DIVISION. Many churches have been divided over societies. Even among its advocates there is now a great division over the policy of those in control. Hence, we have one cause of division now that did not exist in the days of the apostles. Those who introduced the societies and those who advocate and support them are responsible for this new cause of division. Its advocates are not "giving diligence to keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), but they are "giving diligence" to push the claims of the society, even to the disruption of the churches. They disregard and trample under their feet the dying prayer of their Lord "that they may all be one" (John 17: 21), and thereby put themselves in the class the Lord hates (Prov. 6:16-19).

ROBS GOD. The society is not the church. It is an institution organized by man to do the work committed to the church. It has its constitution and by-laws made by man. The fact that the members of the society are members of the church does not make the society the

church, nor any part of the church. A mob punishes a criminal; but the mob is not the authorized minions of the law, even though every member of the mob is a citizen of the United States; and the fact that they do the work the courts are organized to do does not make their actions legal. The society is an institution organized by man to do the work committed to the church, and such institutions are unlawful organizations. Whatever glory is reflected on any one through the operation of the society is reflected on its organizers and supporters. Any man is glorified in the successful operation of his own schemes or inventions. God is glorified in his own institution. "Unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. 3:21).

BENEVOLENCE. In the early history of the church in Jerusalem, those who had means freely gave for the support of those in need. (This matter is discussed in SOUND DOCTRINE, Vol. II, pp. 99-101). At first the apostles had the responsibility of distributing these funds, but later this work was put into the hands of others (Acts 4:36, 37; 5:1, 2; 6:1-6). When the brethren at Antioch sent relief to the brethren in Jerusalem, they sent it to the elders by the hand of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30). The churches as such were to make contributions for the poor (I Cor. 16:1, 2; II Cor. 8). These funds were sent to Jerusalem by messengers selected by the churches (II Cor. 8:18, 23). Each church selected its own messenger or messengers (I Cor. 16:3, 4).

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY. The individual Christian must relieve suffering as he may have opportunity. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

CARING FOR OUR OWN. I Hm. 5:1-16. Paul writes

about the care of the aged widows. To be entitled to the continuous support of the church, a widow must possess certain characteristics (vs. 5-10). Paul charges particularly that those who have widows amongst their close relatives must support them, that the church may be able to devote all its benevolence to those entirely dependent upon it (v. 15). Also verse 8: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." This passage, so often wrested from its connection and made to apply to the duty of a man to support his wife and children, simply makes it the duty of every Christian to care for the dependent widows amongst his near relatives, specially those of his own household. The widows of his own household might be his own mother or grandmother. It is taken for granted that any man will care for his own wife and children, but he might not feel the same responsibility concerning dependent widows amongst his near relatives. If you have a widowed mother, sister, or sister-in-law with none to care for her, you must do that, that the church, relieved of that care, may be able to care for those who have none to care for them. If you do not, you have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever. Besides, any able-bodied Christian should be ashamed to allow 'the church to be burdened with the care of any of his near relatives. Those who do not care for their widows should be dealt with by the church as unbelievers. A widow, indeed, one to be a constant ward of the church, must, besides other characteristics, be destitute of any one to care for her. There is this about the whole affair of helping people: no matter what his circumstances in life may be, one may be in temporary need of help, and it is the duty of the whole church to help him. The man who fell among thieves may have

been in good financial circumstances, but he was in need of temporary help (Luke 10:30-37).

EDIFICATION. To edify is to build up. Edification as applied to the Christian refers to the building of his character. Inspired men were given "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-16). "Wherefore exhort one another, and build one another up, even as also ye do" (I Thes. 5: 11). The church at Corinth was richly endowed with spiritual gifts, and when they came together some seemed to want to make a display of their powers. This caused confusion, which Paul seeks to correct: "So also ye, since ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye abound unto the edifying of the church" (I Cor. 14:12). "Let all things be done unto edifying" (v. 26). It is, then, the duty of the whole church to seek to edify each other in their public meetings and at all other times as opportunity is presented.

HOW EDIFY?

BY ASSOCIATING. It gives one an uplift to meet with other warm-hearted people who are full of the same ideals and are striving for the same ends,

BY TEACHING. The elders should be the leaders in teaching as in all other activities of the church. But they are not to do all the teaching any more than they are to do all the other work. In fact, Paul says that those possessing spiritual gifts enabling them to teach might all prophesy, or teach (I Cor. 14:31). This warrants us in concluding that any one who has anything to say that would benefit the church should be given the privilege of saying it. Many elders make no special effort to prepare themselves to teach. No one can impart information and zeal to others which he himself does not possess. A few commonplace remarks as to the purpose of the Lord's Supper, repeated over and over, year in and year out, do not edify any one. The

elders should see that others are developed into teachers. Appoint some one to speak next Lord's day. Give him time to prepare something.

WORK. The leaders should see that every member is kept as busy as possible in some form of work. Many Christians grow cold and perish for lack of exercise.

CHURCH CO-OPERATION.

In New Testament times the churches, by means of messengers, cooperated. A messenger is simply the bearer of a message. He has no authority delegated him to act for those sending him, more than to deliver the message intrusted to him. When he delivers the message and returns the answer, if any, his work as a messenger is finished. He could be a faithful messenger without even knowing the nature of the message. As a messenger he has no right to make, nor to confer with others in making plans, nor in any way obligate those sending him. A delegate is one who is empowered by the body sending him to act in conjunction with other delegates in formulating plans of operation binding on all the bodies represented. The body of delegates becomes a legislative body, and every church represented in that body is obligated to every measure adopted. The New Testament church never had any delegates—they sent messengers. Their use of messengers is seen in the cooperation of the churches in assisting the church in Jerusalem (II Cor. 8:16-24; 9:2-5; I Cor. 16: 3, 4).

In New Testament times the fellowship was direct between the church and the beneficiaries. The church in Antioch sent money direct to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29, 30). Later all the churches that made contributions for the church in Jerusalem sent messengers to carry their contributions direct to the brethren in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:3, 4). The church at Philippi sent

assistance direct to Paul on the mission field (Phil. 1: 3-7). Epaphroditus was their messenger (Phil. 2:25).

TOPICS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION.

1. A Model Church.
2. Relationship of the Church to Christ.
3. The Church at Corinth.
4. The Church at Ephesus.
5. Little Things (Ezek. 16:47; I Kings 16:31).

QUESTIONS.

1. What is an ecclesiasticism?
2. Who is the Head of the church? Quote passage.
3. What is the mission of the church?
4. What is the field?
5. What is the natural order relative to one's own?
6. What the order of the apostles in their evangelistic work?
7. What caused the church at Jerusalem to be scattered? When? Quote.
8. Whom did the church send out? Quote.
9. What was he sent to do? Quote.
10. Whom did the church at Antioch send? Quote.
11. To whom did they report on their return? Quote.
12. What caused the trouble in Antioch? Cite passage.
13. Whom did they send to Jerusalem? Quote.
14. To whom was the reply from Jerusalem sent? Cite passage.
15. Who established the church at Philippi?
16. Where do we find the record of the establishment of this church?
17. Did they contribute to Paul? Give passage.
18. Why is a church called a candlestick?
19. Where is a church so called?
20. How is the church the pillar and ground of the truth? Give passage.
21. How often did Philippi send to Paul's assistance?
22. What is your church doing as the pillar and ground of the truth?