

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



April 10, 2011

The Mission of the Church

The purpose of the church is to teach people to be active in good works, not to do the good works for them. Modern churches have forgotten that distinction.

“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. . . . And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:8, 14).

“Good works” is a major theme in Paul’s little letter to this young preacher (in addition to the verses above, see also 1:16; 2:7,14; 3:1). Clearly, a significant part of a preacher’s work is to motivate, encourage, and inspire God’s people to be active in good works. And the preacher is not the only one involved in this task. All leadership functions in the church exist “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Eph. 4:11-12, NIV). Preparing God’s people for the work of serving others provides a great benefit to mankind; it is “good and profitable to men” (Tit. 3:14).

But there is a glaring truth here that most people never notice. The role of the church is to teach God’s people to do good works; *it is not the church’s role to*

do the good works for them. A failure to recognize that distinction has sent many churches down the wrong path and, ironically, hurt the very good works they claim to care so much about.

In most modern churches, the New Testament model is turned completely backwards. Churches create an array of offices, programs, and institutions, staffed by professionals, for the sole purpose of performing good works. So instead of teaching church members to be active in good works, churches are stepping in and doing the good works for them. The intentions may be noble, but the results are usually disappointing.

Compare Paul’s description of good works in his epistle to Titus with how modern churches function. Instead of teaching young mothers to love their children (2:3-4), churches operate day care centers to love their children for them. Instead of teaching saints to be peaceable (3:2), churches organize peace initiatives, lobbying for government action on an assortment of trendy causes. (And some of these peaceniks are among the most confrontational,

hateful people you’ll ever meet.) Instead of teaching employees how to be trustworthy, productive workers (2:9-10), churches agitate for workers’ rights, again attempting to pull the levers of political machinery to influence policy. If people learn anything in these activities, it’s that we can pay someone else to do our good works for us. That’s not what Paul taught.

There is nothing in the New Testament that prevents people from organizing themselves into enterprises having good works as their primary mission. These charitable institutions can provide excellent opportunities for God’s people to volunteer helping others. But the church is not one of these institutions, and it should not attempt to compete with them.

The mission of the church is primarily educational, not philanthropic. When churches lose sight of that distinction, they almost always get sidetracked, and their most basic responsibility — to inspire God’s people to be active in doing good — gets lost in the busy-work of running a bureaucracy.

– David King