

morally and religiously.” Today’s culture — *as well as* some modern translations of the Bible — have *adjusted* that meaning. Edify is *now* being replaced with phrases like “build-up,” — “raise to an emotional high” — “promote cheerfulness” — “fill with warm fuzzy feelings” or “provide a feeling of happiness”. While those may all be nice things for Christians to do — they don’t fit the definition for “edification.” Again — edify means “to bring to spiritual maturity; to *instruct* and *improve morally and religiously*.” Paul instructed Timothy to do this exact thing.

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

(II Timothy 2:1-2 NASB)

In Hebrews 5:12-14, the writer chastises the Hebrews — all of them — as a *collective* group of believers — for not maturing in the manner they should.

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (NASB)

That *collective* group of believers had apparently *not* been edifying each other (or bringing to spiritual maturity) the way they should have. Many Christians nowadays however would not associate these verses in Hebrews with edification. That word is morphing into a modern day meaning that is not consistent with Scriptural intent — and that is largely due to some of the newer Bible translations using words like “build-up” and “encourage” in place of “edify”.

Each *individual* believer has his or her own part to fulfill toward the edification of the *collective* group of believers.

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”
(Ephesians 4:11-15 KJV)

Next issue: The Mission Of The Church — Continued

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Dennis and Sherri Owens — Cincinnati, Ohio
diligence@gorfsystems.com — <http://www.gorfsystems.com/diligence/>*



DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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The Mission Of The Church

We begin this discussion with the understanding that when we speak of the “mission of the church” — we *could* say that we are actually speaking of the “mission of the believers” — for the believers *are* the church. A search through the New Testament however, reveals that there are not only references to *individual* believers but there are *also* references to the “church” *as a collective group* of believers. One example of this would of course be Romans 16:16 that reads —

“...The churches of Christ salute you.” (KJV)

We could probably say that in *today’s* culture, when we speak of the “church” *as a collective group* we use a variety of terms. We might say — “the local congregation” or “the churches in Cincinnati,” or the “the churches of Northern Kentucky” or the “East End church” or “the Culver Street church” or some other term that indicates we are speaking of the church *as a collective group* rather than as the *individual believers* who in turn make up the *collective group*.

So then — we ask the question — when we speak of the “mission of the church” are we referring to the “church” as *individual* believers — or — are we referring to the “church” as the *collective group* — as a whole? Does it really *matter*? Is there a *difference* between the manner in which we, as *individual* Christians are instructed to carry out our *individual* mission as opposed to the manner in which “the church” as a *collective group* (or local congregation) of Christians, is instructed to carry out the *collective* mission? Do *all* of the Biblical instructions that relate to what we would define as addressing the “mission of the church” refer to the “mission of the church — as *individuals*” or to the “mission of the church — as a *collective group*”? Is the mission the same for both or is the mission different — depending on *which* is being addressed in a particular Scripture? Is it *important* for us to scrutinize the *context* of each Biblical example to determine *which* is being spoken of — or does it matter — since the “church” *is* the individual believers anyway? But then — *individual* believers — when they gather together — *are* a *collective group* — and *some* of the Scripture verses *do* address the believers in *that* context. So *is* the mission *always* the same — or is it *different* depending on *which* is being addressed in the *context* of the particular verse or verses of Scripture? Does the title of this article “The Mission Of The Church,” refer to the responsibility of each *individual* believer or to the “church” *when* those believers are gathered together *as a collective group*. Does it *vary* — depending on the *context* in the Scriptures? Confused? Well, let’s let that lie there for awhile and come back to it from time to time throughout this discussion.

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It would probably be safe to say that generally speaking, most of us would agree that there are three categories that make up the mission of the church. Just about any activity, function, task or direct command we read of in the Scriptures falls into one of three categories. Namely, they are — 1) Evangelism, 2) Edification and 3) Benevolence. We want to take a detailed look at each of those — one at a time. We'll also look at each one in relation to our discussion as to whether or not the Biblical authority for each one is referring to our mission as an *individual* Christian or our mission as a *collective group* of Christians or as both — or whether or not it even matters. Let's begin with —

Evangelism —

This is perhaps the most obvious as well as the most frequently spoken of portion of the mission of the church. Surely most of us can quote these verses from memory.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...” (Matt. 28:19-20 KJV)

Each and every one of us is commanded to proclaim the Good News of salvation through Christ. Luke 19:10 tells us that Christ's *reason* for coming to earth was *“to seek and to save that which was lost.”* Then Jesus Himself made it clear that we are to carry on that *same* mission when He said —

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12 NIV)

That this ministry is a responsibility that has been passed on to *each one* of us is also evident in these words of Paul to the Corinthians.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.... (II Cor. 5:17-20 NIV)

Acts 8:4-5 makes it clear that *individual* believers in the early church carried out the task of spreading the Gospel.

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.” (NIV)

So we can see from just these *few* verses that we — as *individual* believers are charged with spreading the Gospel (the mission of Evangelism). We see that charge given not only by command but also by example. So is that also true for the church as a *collective group*? Let's look at these words of Paul to the Ephesians.

“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the

unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. ¹⁰His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Eph. 3:7-11 NIV)

In verses 7 through 9, Paul is speaking of his responsibility as an *individual* believer but look at verse 10. *“His [God's] intent was that ... through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known...”* Now the next part of that verse — *“to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms...”* is another study for another time — and a very interesting one at that. Just as some food for thought however, it seems that since the angels observe everything that we do (Luke 15:10; I Cor 4:9; I Cor 11:10) God is using the church — the *collective* body of believers — to make known the mystery of salvation through Christ. One commentator put it this way.

“God doesn't use the angels to reveal His wisdom to the saints, but He does use the saints to reveal His wisdom to the angelic beings, both faithful and fallen angels.” (David Guzik)

The end of I Corinthians 4:9 — included in that list above states: *“...We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.”* The Greek word used for “spectacle” in that verse is the word from which we get our English word “theater.” So we could say that the church — as the *collective* group of believers is a “theater” for the display of God's manifold wisdom — not only to mankind but also to our “fellow servants” (Rev. 19:10) — the angels.

Before we move on from our discussion on the mission of Evangelism, we want to also take a quick look at Romans 10:14-15.

“¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how can they preach unless they are sent?...” (NIV)

Notice verse 15 indicates that *someone* is expected to *send* preachers to preach the Word. Philippians 4:14-16 and II Corinthians 11:8-9 are just a couple of examples of the church — as a *collective* group of believers engaging in that work.

So we can see from just *these* few verses that Evangelism is obviously a part of the mission of the church. We can also see that it is spoken of as being both an *individual* responsibility as well as a responsibility of the church as a *collective* group of believers. So let's move on to —

Edification —

The subject of “Edify” was discussed in *Diligence* on May 15, 2004 (Volume 3, Issue 7). We strongly urge you to visit the web site listed at the bottom of page 4 and read that issue. The word “edify” means to “*instruct* — especially in moral and religious knowledge” or “to bring to spiritual maturity; to *instruct* and *improve*