

CAN WE CREATE A BETTER WAY TO DO GOD'S WORK?

Who can improve on the works of Jehovah? Can any mortal man create anything to equal God's work, much less improve on it? It is foolish for man to try to improve on God's physical creation. It is even more so to think he can improve on God's spiritual creation and ordinances.

That God planned the church is indisputable (Eph. 3:10-11). That his Son purchased the church by his death on Calvary cannot be denied (Acts 20:28). The only record we have of the "origination, nature and purpose of the church is found in the New Testament of Christ. The mission of the church is clearly set forth in that Testament. She is to glorify God (Rom. 15:6). She is to lift up Christ before a confused and lost world (I Cor. 1:23-24). She is to preach the gospel of Christ to every creature and make disciples of them by baptizing them into a saving relationship with the sacred Three (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20). She is to do good unto all men especially those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). She is to nurture and edify her children and bring them to Christian maturity (Eph.4:11-15). As a body of people committed to restoring the original church of Christ, these principles should always be before us.

In 1849, one hundred twenty-seven prominent leaders of the restoring churches assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio. Bro. D. S. Burnet presented his plan to organize a missionary society to manage and supervise the mission work of the churches of Christ. Burnet. In Burnet's mind the meeting "was a call for a general convention of our bishops and evangelists, to consider the momentous question of church organization, missionary operation and the 'Bible Society'." Likely, many of those arriving thought they were only trying to find an efficient way to send out missionaries. It is noteworthy that L. L. Pinkerton was called to chair the meeting. Pinkerton later was the first man to introduce an instrument of music into the worship of the church he served. While the majority were swept away by the eloquence and persuasiveness of Burnet and his grandiose scheme, a few men dared to question the logic behind his proposal.

Jacob Creath was first to articulate his objections. He was eventually joined by stalwarts such as Tolbert Fanning, Benjamin Franklin, David Lipscomb and others. The objections they lodged against forming an human organization to do the work of the church were as follows:

1. That it was a substitute for the church, that it was a human invention and without divine authority. When the society did its evangelistic work it was usurping the rights of the church.
2. That societies were built on the assumption that the Lord's church cannot or will not do the work assigned to it. The founders must therefore assume that their plan can do the job better than God's.
3. That the Church of Christ is the Lord's Missionary Society. He is its Head, and every member a life member and director.
4. That the Society had its origin in a desire to be like the denominations around us.
5. That to do its announced job the Missionary Society would have to assume power or control over the churches who were the source of its income and the fruit of its efforts.
6. That the Society was the cause of division and conflict in the brotherhood.
7. That the society was a poor investment of God's money since the operating overhead consumed most of the money.
8. That there was no Scriptural authority for the creation and existence of the Missionary Society, therefore it was unscriptural, unauthorized and condemned. (Earl West. Search For the Ancient Order, Vol. 2 (Indianapolis: Religious Book Service, 1950) pp. 51-71).

For years the society floundered, consuming most of the funds it raised for its overhead, and with little actual missionary activity. Rather than accept defeat, the promoters created even more organizations to do the various tasks God ordained for his church to perform. There were Christian Women's Missionary Society, Youth Societies, Benevolent Societies, State Societies, etc, etc. Eventually those determined to have their human organization, embraced instrumental music, women in church leadership and theological liberalism. They preferred their human organizations and inventions to the fellowship of their conservative brothers who could not in

good conscience embrace them. The contention these issue created led to tragic division of the church. The Disciples of Christ denomination is a case study in where such thinking will lead a body of people.

Today a generation has arisen that obviously knows not this sad chapter of our history. In numerous cases we find brethren, with best intentions, creating organizations to do the missionary evangelistic work God assigned to his church. Evidently these brethren feel the church with her elders is incapable of doing the work of evangelism as well as their evangelism corporations and associations. Predictably, many of those inclined to create their own organizations for evangelism also are receptive to the broader agenda of the change movement.

In large letters, write on the tablet of your heart that the church of Christ is thoroughly capable of doing all that God has assigned her to do. It is vanity for sinful man to think he can improve on God's method. It is shameful to view the church as only a source of revenue for organizations we create in preference to God's plan. JHW