

Many groups claim they do 'the work'

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BIG SANDY, Texas—A few years ago someone asked me: Where do you think the work of God is being done?

I knew his frame of reference, and I knew what he wanted me to say. He was hoping I would single out one of the church groups and identify that one group as the one and only one doing "the" work.

However, I decided to politely challenge his frame of reference.

We talked about the difference between the work "of" God and works "for" God.

We talked about the many service projects of church groups.

In this article I want to share some information from that conversation. I realize that many of you already understand what I will write.

Service projects

Let's look at a few worthwhile service projects done by church groups.

- A monthly religious magazine and booklets can be helpful to people.
- A weekly religious television show can expose people to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- A daily radio show can give people a regular source of information or encouragement.
- A monthly mailing of taped sermons can be encouraging to scattered brethren.

These projects are not the problem. Rather, the problem is how people view the projects.

Church groups are doing worthwhile service projects, and they should be happy about what they do. But it is ludicrous to call their service projects "the work of God."

By the hand of God?

First, consider the phrase "work of God." People use it to imply that God is doing the service projects.

Is God personally inspiring every word in the magazine? Is God personally inspiring every word on the telecast? Okay, so these magazines and telecasts are not the actual work of God, are they?

No matter how worthwhile the service project may be, God is not doing these works. Therefore these service projects are not works "of" God, but they may be works "for" God.

(I say they "may be" works for God because some who claim to do works for God are really doing works for self-promotion or for money.)

A little later in this article I will list some of the marvelous works of God. That list will dwarf the service projects that church groups do for God.

The only one?

Second, consider the word *the* in the phrase "the work of God." When people use the article *the*, they often use their service projects as a spiritual measuring stick to profess their superiority over other people and to condemn other people.

Many say that, if you do not submit to their version of "the" work of God, you have a lesser standing in the sight of God.

Some do this unintentionally because of misguided zeal. Others use the false concept of "the work" as a marketing ploy to put psychological pressure on people.

Whether recruiting new members or keeping members from leaving their physical group, they often try the exclusivist approach first. When followers wise up to that charade, they try the elitist approach.

The exclusivist approach is: We are the only true church that is doing "the work," so you must stay with us to receive salvation.

The elitist approach is: We are the best true church, because we are the only church that is doing "the work" as God intended.

In context

Someone may say: The Bible includes scriptures that clearly identify that our church is doing "the work."

My response: I know some of the scriptures, because many other groups have told me that those verses are talking about them and not you.

Many different groups claim that the following verses are prophecies about their magazine or their telecast.

Let's look at the context and see how the works of God are much greater than a magazine or telecast.

■ Isaiah 29:14 says: Therefore, behold. I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder.

The context is God's heavy judgment against Jerusalem (verses 1-6).

■ Habakkuk 1:5 says: Behold, regard and wonder marvelously; because I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe though it be told to you.

The context is God elevating the Chaldeans for vengeance (verses 5-11).

■ Acts 13:41 says: I work a work in your days, a work which you shall not believe, though a man declare it unto you.

The context is the people not believing that God raised Jesus (verses 16-39).

■ Romans 9:28 says: He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work on the earth.

The context is the calling of the gentiles (verses 24-33).

■ John 14:12 mentions Jesus saying: He that believes on Me shall do the works that I do and greater works.

I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard a person claim that the greater works referred to a magazine or a telecast. I suppose people today could claim that "greater works" refers to the Internet.

But the context is Jesus' promise that disciples would receive the Holy Spirit (verses 16-26). This tremendous event occurred after Jesus went to His Father (Acts 1-2).

If you think it is ridiculous for people to say the earth is flat, how much more ridiculous is it for people to say that religious magazines and telecasts are greater works than the coming of the Holy Spirit?

Familiar prophecy

Maybe I should take a moment to mention a familiar prophecy that is often associated with the false concept of "the work of God."

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said that the gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations.

■ Some people actually have a theory that this prophecy was accomplished by A.N. Dugger, C.O. Dodd or H.W. Armstrong.

No matter how successful you or I may believe these men were, none of them fulfilled the prophecy of Matthew 24:14. People will someday be embarrassed that they even suggested such a theory.

■ Some people actually have a theory that this prophecy is being accomplished by successors to the previously mentioned three men.

Since the successors are making less of an impact than the previously mentioned three men, these theories are even more amazing.

As I already mentioned, the magazines and telecasts are worthwhile service projects. But Matthew 24:14 will be primarily fulfilled by the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-13) and an angel (Revelation 14:6-7).

Marvelous works of God

The work of God is much more than worthwhile service projects. Here are only a few examples of the marvelous works of God in the past.

- A work of God was God creating the universe.
- A work of God was God creating our solar system.
- A work of God was God creating the earth and the moon.
- A work of God was God creating time.
- A work of God was God creating the animal kingdom in all its diversity and majesty.
- A work of God was God creating people and giving them dominion over the animal kingdom.
- A work of God was God planning to bring many sons into glory.
- A work of God was God sending Jesus as the Messiah.
- A work of God was God raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

From the heavenly throne

Here are a few examples of the works of God today.

- A work of God is God leading people to repentance.
- A work of God is God imparting His Spirit within people.
- A work of God is God providing unity within a spiritual organism while men seek to divide believers and place themselves in the preeminence.
- A work of God is God using trials to help saints within the spiritual Body of Christ draw closer to Him.
- A work of God is God answering the prayers of saints.
- A work of God is preaching the gospel through the spiritual organism called the Body of Christ. (The spiritual Body of Christ is scattered within society and within church groups as the salt of the earth.)

People have asked: How can the gospel of the Kingdom of God be preached without the coordination of a physical headquarters and a physical administration?

My response: Surely they jest. People do not want to insult God, do they?

The hand of God

Here are a few examples of the works of God in the future.

- A work of God will be God bringing saints before kings and rulers for Jesus' name's sake as a testimony (Luke 21:12-13). The gospel will be preached by the power of the Holy Spirit (verses 14-15).
- A work of God will be God giving power to His two witnesses and raising them from the dead (Revelation 11:3-13).
- A work of God will be God sending an angel to preach the gospel to the entire world (Revelation 14:6-7).
- A work of God will be God sending Jesus Christ back to earth.
- A work of God will be God raising the elect from their graves.
- A work of God will be God overseeing the Millennium.
- A work of God will be God overseeing the great-white-throne judgment.
- A work of God will be God overseeing the new heavens and new earth.

Merciful God

Someone may ask:

Isn't God angry with those who limit His presence and power to the confines of a specific church organization?

My response:

Probably, but let's remember that God is merciful.

One of the greatest works of God is Him leading people to repentance. He is continually leading people to see that the Body of Christ is a spiritual organism.

Let's pray that more saints will have eyes to see.