

“YOU’RE NOT DOING ANYTHING”

INTRODUCTION:

1. The charge is made from time to time, by some among the liberally-minded churches of Christ, that conservative-minded churches are “not doing anything.”
 - A. This is usually stated in response to the certain questions concerning the scriptural nature of one or more of the projects these churches may be involved in.
 - B. The implication of the statement is that it is better to do something unscriptural than “to do nothing.”
2. I have thought about this charge, and I want to share some thoughts with you about it today.
3. This is really serious accusation to make about any church or any Christian.
 - A. Christians and congregations of Christians must be doing the work of the Lord in order to be pleasing to the Lord.
 - i. Christians who really aren’t “doing anything” are not faithful Christians.
 - ii. And churches that really aren’t “doing anything” are not faithful churches.
 - B. 1st century Christians were commanded to be busily involved in the Lord’s work; and so are we.
 - i. 1 Cor. 15:58 -- *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always **abounding in the work of the Lord**, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*
 - ii. Gal. 6:10 – *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*
4. The inspired writers of the New Testament prayed that 1st century Christians and 1st century churches would be busily involved in the Lord’s work.
 - A. Col. 1:9-10 – *“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being **fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God;”*
 - B. 1 Thess. 1:2-3 – *“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your **work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.**”*
5. Christians and churches are being judged by the Lord right now...and will be judged at the last day...according to their works.
 - A. Rev 2:1-5 – *“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.’”*
 - B. Rev 22:12 – *“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one **according to his work.**”*
6. So, there is no question that “doing something” for the Lord is necessary for faithfulness. But, what does God truly require?

BODY:

- I. **The Lord will judge Christians and churches concerning the work He has *authorized us to do.***
 - A. Those who accuse us need to use the same standard of judgment—and I don’t think they are.
 1. It’s not enough to be “doing” (“working”)—we’ve got to be doing what the Lord has authorized us to do. We’ve got to be doing “the Lord’s work.”
 2. Look again at the church at Ephesus that was about to lose its candlestick (Revelation 2:1-5).
 - a. Their problem was not that they weren’t doing anything.
 - i. Jesus said, *“I know your works, your labor, ...”* (v2).
 - ii. Jesus said, *“(you) have labored for My name’s sake”* (v3).

- b. But they had gotten away from the works they had done at first and they needed to repent (*“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...”* (v. 4, 5).
 - i. I think many conservative churches have left their first love. They are not excited about the Lord and they are not excited about doing his work.
 - ii. It is surely not enough to stake our claim to salvation on everything we do not do!
- B. So, we need to know what work the Lord has authorized us to do in His service...and do it.
1. We need to do “the work of Christ” (Phil. 2:30) or “the work of the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).
 - a. We need to do the work that is revealed and authorized in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17 – *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”*).
 - b. Whatever works we do must be “in the name of Jesus,” or by His authority (Col. 3:17 – *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”*).
 - c. Acting “in the name of Jesus” mean doing what is revealed, not just attaching God’s name to the work (Matt. 7:21-23). So, what is that work?
 2. That work is: **Saving the lost (evangelism)**.
 - a. Acts 8:4 – *“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”*
 - b. 1 Thess. 1:8 – *“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.”*
 - c. Phil. 4:15-16 – *“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”*
 3. That work is also: **Strengthening the saved (edification)**.
 - a. 1 Cor. 14:26 – *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”*
 - b. Heb. 10:24-25 – *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*
 - c. Gal. 6:1 – *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”*
 4. Finally, that work is: **Helping the poor and the afflicted (Benevolence)**.
 - a. Acts 4:34-35 – *“Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”*
 - b. Heb. 6:10 – *“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”*
 - c. James 1:27 – *“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”*
- C. In order for it to be true that we are “not doing anything” it would have to be true that we are “not doing anything” (1) to save the lost, or (2) to strengthen the saved, or (3) to help the poor and the afflicted.
1. Now, with that in view, can there be any legitimacy to an accusation that we are “not doing anything”?
 2. No. That is a false accusation.

II. One might wonder on what basis was that accusation made?

- A. The answer to that question is three-fold.
 1. “You’re not growing (in number)”/“You are dying.”

2. “You are saving so few people.”
 3. “You have so few programs of work going on.”
 4. I want to respond to each of those complaints.
- B. Accusation: “*You’re not growing (in number)*”/ “*You are dying.*”
1. Numerical growth is not a legitimate goal for any congregation.
 - a. There are many factors that influence the numerical growth, decline, or fluctuation of a congregation. And some of those factors have nothing whatsoever to do with what the church is doing or not doing.
 - b. Some of these factors are:
 - i. Christians move into the community...and Christians move out of the community.
 - ii. Christians die...and Christians have babies, etc.
 2. The legitimate goals of a congregation are: (1) spiritual growth of the congregation, and (2) serving the Lord faithfully and doing the Lord’s work to the extent of our abilities and opportunities.
 - a. Our “aim,” or goal, is to be pleasing to God (2 Cor. 5:9 – “*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.*”).
 - b. We “press on” in Christ’s work to gain our prize (Phil. 3:12, 14 – “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*”)
 3. If working diligently in the pursuit of these legitimate spiritual goals results in the numerical growth of the congregation (and in many cases it will), that is very good.
 - a. But if standing for the truth, and exposing error, and rebuking the rebellious, and withdrawing from the unrepentant, and confining our work to the legitimate work of the church results in a numerical decline in the congregation, ***so be it.***
 - b. When we place emphasis on numerical growth, and make *numerical* growth a goal of the congregation, we are going to be tempted to do things in order to accomplish that goal that are not legitimate. Many churches of Christ have been...
 - i. Tempted to “soft pedal” the gospel in order to attract members and keep members.
 - ii. Tempted to exhort only—and leave off reproving and rebuking.
 - iii. Tempted to transform the church into something God never intended it to be in order to attract members and keep members.
 - iv. In doing all these things we may continue to call it “evangelism,” yet, in reality, it is nothing more than “recruiting.”
 4. We ought to be far more concerned about the numerical growth of the church *universal*, the body of Christ, than the church *local*.
 - a. You cannot “sweet talk” anybody into the church universal—the body of Christ.
 - b. And you cannot “over persuade” someone into the church universal.
 - c. You cannot “lure” people into the church universal.
 - d. You see, the Lord adds to the church (church universal) daily those who are being saved (i.e., really converted and saved – Acts 2:47).
 - e. And remember: “*The Lord knows those who are His...*” (2 Tim. 2:19).
 - f. You can swell the rolls of local churches and not add one name to the roll of the universal church! We don’t want to be guilty of doing this!
- C. Accusation: “*You are saving so few people.*”
1. First, we must remember that we are not responsible for “the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6 – “*I planted, Apollos watered, but **God** gave the increase.*”). **We must do what we can to teach.** Yet, God ultimately brings the increase.
 2. Second, if Noah were judged by that standard, he would be condemned.
 - a. He preached for 120 years while he was building the ark, and saved only 8 people, including himself!

- i. 2 Pet. 2:5 – *“and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;...”*
- ii. Heb. 11:7 – *“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”*
- b. I can picture...
 - i. People questioning the “productive” nature of Noah’s approach, telling him that he need not preach so much on “repentance” and “righteousness” and redesign the ark to accommodate people’s desire for fun, food, and social activities.
 - ii. In fact, I can picture others building their own ark and filling it with all kinds of people that simply wouldn’t be drawn to Noah’s plain message and plain ark!
 - iii. Yet, I can also picture the rains coming and only one of those arks, Noah’s ark, floating and saving those within it! All else would perish!
 - iv. That, of course, is a very fearful thought!

D. Accusation: *“You have so few programs going on.”*

- 1. What kinds of “programs” are our accusers using as examples to judge us?
 - a. Some consider aerobics classes, weight-loss classes, family counseling classes, sports, etc., to be “programs” for the local church.
 - b. The idea is: Use what the masses are interested in to get them in here, and then when you get them in, you can teach them.
 - c. That sounds like a “plan”; but is it scriptural?
- 2. I believe it proper to ask what programs of work the churches of the 1st century had going on that we don’t have going on here at this church?
 - a. In no place within the N.T. do we read about most of the things characterized today as *works of the church!*
 - b. Is it important if we cannot find these things to reject them?
 - i. Yes! We can’t know the will of God unless it is revealed by the Holy Spirit in His word.
 - ii. 1 Cor. 4:6 – *“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us **not to think beyond what is written**, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.”*
 - iii. 1 Cor. 2:11-12 – *“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”*
 - iv. So, if it is not written, or revealed, for us to know within the Scriptures, we are being presumptuous to assume it is a “thing of God” and that He will accept it!
 - v. I can’t imagine churches of the 1st century doing what most churches of the 21th century are doing?!
 - c. So, if they could faithfully do the Lord’s work without the “family life centers,” the “fellowship halls,” and the recreation and entertainment activities, and the aerobics classes, and the day care centers, surely we can too!
- 3. If we turn the local church into something other than the spiritual institution it was intended to be, we will be held accountable for it!
 - a. The Jews did this to the Temple and faced the wrath of the Lord (Jn. 2:13-16 – *“Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’”*).

- b. Our weapons are not focused on the flesh (2 Cor. 10:4 – *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”*).
- 4. A study of First Corinthians 1 and 2 suggests that the people of our generation are not the first to demand fleshly incentives.
 - a. The Jews and Greeks of Paul’s day demanded them, too: *“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom”* (1 Cor. 1:22).
 - i. Paul could have produced both, but he refused to produce either.
 - ii. He said: *“But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”* (1 Cor. 1:23-24).
 - b. Why are such people so infrequently called?
 - i. Paul recognized that some people are just not capable of being converted to Christ: *“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called”* (1 Cor. 1:26).
 - ii. Because their real interests are in the things of the flesh rather than the things of God.
 - iii. And, Paul was not about to coax fleshly-minded, “unconverted” people, into the local churches by the use of signs, wisdom, excellency of speech, enticing words, etc.
 - iv. To do so would result in getting their names on a “church roll,” but not in truly bringing them to Christ to the saving of their souls.
 - c. If Paul refused to use signs and wisdom as fleshly incentives, what would have been his reaction to the use of recreation, cokes, hot dogs, and aerobics classes?
 - d. If Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, followed a “no fleshly incentives” policy, shouldn’t that be our policy (1 Cor. 2:2 – *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”*).
- 5. Isn’t it amazing that so many churches are using the very things Jesus said would choke out the word in order to get people to come in so they can teach them the word (Lk. 8:14 – *“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”*)?!

CONCLUSION:

- 1. It concerns me that we may have been accused of “not doing anything.”
- 2. But, those who do accuse know so little about what each of us is doing for it to be fair to make such an accusation.
- 3. But the Lord knows exactly what we’re doing and what we’re not doing; and I am far more concerned that the Lord might accuse us of not doing enough.
- 4. We need to examine ourselves individually and as a congregation and be honest with ourselves about what the Lord’s judgment of us might be (Gal 6:4 – *“But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another”*).