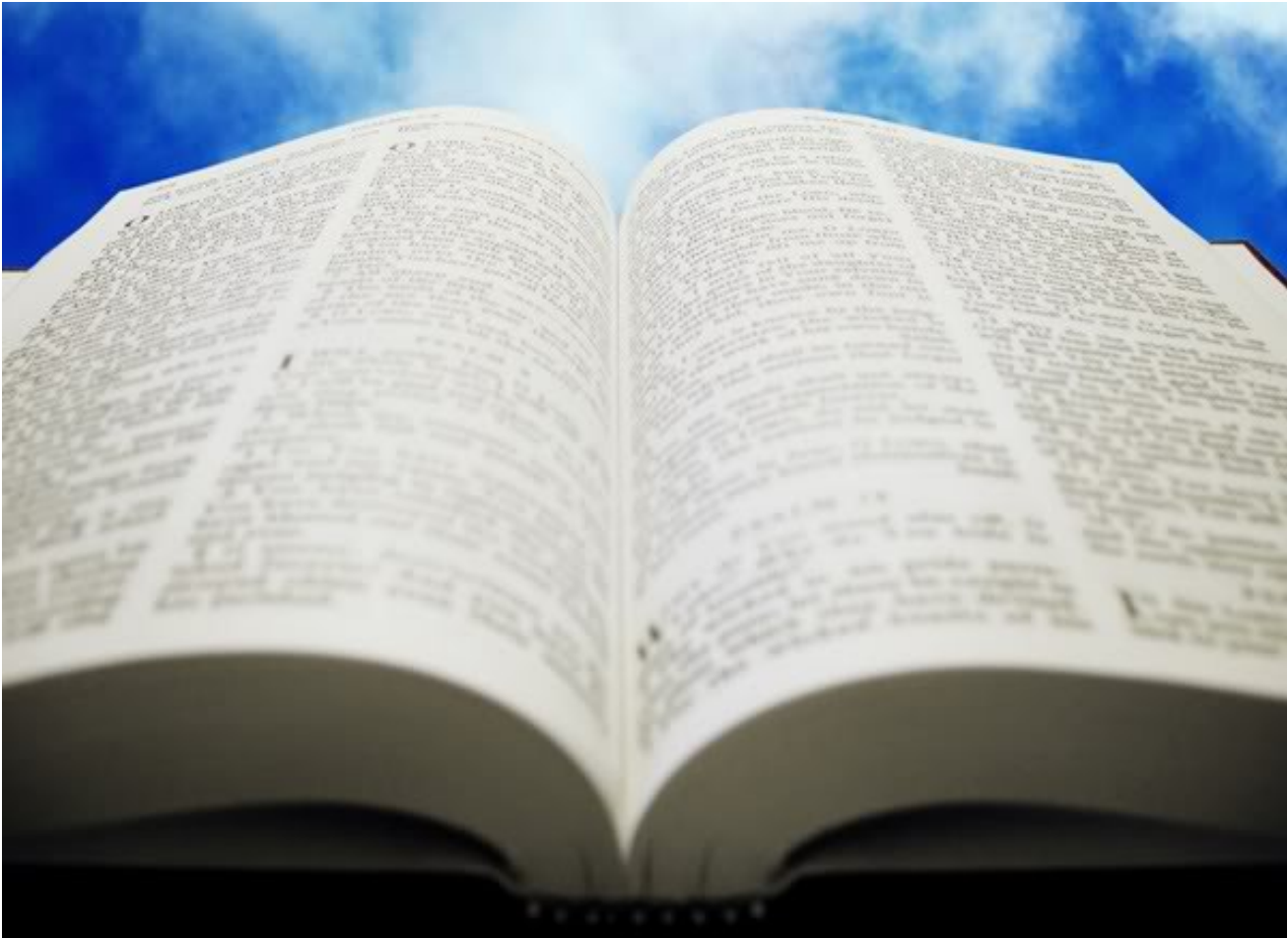


# *Clearing The Confusion*

## *Preachers, Elders, Deacons And The Congregation*



By Jim Miller  
The Keys Of The Kingdom

# *Forward*

After many discussion with others on the topics of preachers and elders and deacons along with what the congregations are instructed by God to do, I have found a real lack of understanding on the part of many as to what these positions entail and much error has crept in to the church because of a lack of teaching on them.

I will endeavor here to try and clear up some of the myths and misconceptions of the duties of each of the above mentioned positions. I will try to take each position and give scriptural answer to how and what they entail. It is my hope and prayer you will give careful attention this so that not only do you have a better understanding but also be able to clearly teach others what God has to say about the functions of the church and those who hold the different positions therein. This in no way is an in depth study. It is designed to give you an overview of each position.

Nothing I write here is new. Many men over the years have said much the same thing just in different words or ways or phrases in fact I quote from some of their writings.

Jim Miller

# *The Preacher*

The preacher is a man who has dedicated himself to proclaiming the word of God that others might come to know of the saving grace and mercy of our Lord. He takes his position as preacher very seriously as he will be held to a higher standard than the everyday Christian in the congregation. He is usually called upon to preach at least two sermons and to teach two classes a week. This is of course if there is not a gospel meeting going on or a special class on some topic that needs attending to.

Few people really understand what all is entailed in being a preacher. They believe that his position is one of ease only having to get up in front of the congregation two or three times a week and speak on God's word and that he can do this easily and the rest of his time is his own to do as he pleases. In reality **nothing** could be farther from the truth.

Many congregations think the preacher is a **hireling** that he is to do their work for them. Some congregations believe that the preacher is supposed to take on the duties that they themselves are to be doing. Some say that it is the preacher's job to take up the slack of the congregation because they just don't have the time.

Some believe since they do not have time or make time for their duties as Christians that they can **employ** the preacher to do it for them. To most people's surprise the preacher is **not** just someone **hired** to pick up the slack of the church members. Too many people have the idea that the preacher should get out and round up all the straying sheep (Elders Duty).

If brethren within the church become "at odds" with one another, the preacher should arbitrate between them (Elders Duty).

If anyone in the congregation gets sick that the preacher should just run right over dropping everything and go see about it. If members become needy, the preacher should know it and be sure it is taken care of (Again Elders and Deacons Duty).

Preachers are expected to make rounds to hospitals like a doctor would and they are not to dare miss visiting the homes of members.

Preachers are expected to run errands for everybody who calls on them these days. Is it any wonder they have so little time to prepare their lesson let alone study for themselves. To often members believe that this is what the preacher is paid for and he better do it or else.

Now, I am not saying that a preacher should not visit (care for) the sick, or run errands, or help the needy but it is **not** a part of his preaching duty. As any Christian he has the same responsibility the as any other member has. However, there is no scriptural evidence that such works are to be performed as part of his duty as a preacher.

Acts 6:2 tells us what Paul had to say about this. The apostles said, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God to serve tables." Here the principle is well established that preaching the gospel is more important than taking care of physical details. The church under the guidance of the apostles was instructed to choose from among them men who would take care of serving tables and the apostles could give themselves "continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

Today because of a lack of leadership in the church most congregations expect the preacher to make sure there is a weekly bulletin, expect the lawn to be mowed and host of other things that do not fall within the purview of preaching duties. In Paul's letters to Timothy, he explains the work of an evangelist, generally speaking, is

to live an exemplary life (I Tim. 4:12), and to read, study and teach (2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 1 Tim. 4:13). What a tremendous task this is in itself You should try being what we call a "full-time" preacher and see for yourself.

Today there are those who complain about how "their preacher spends too much time in study" they do not understand the real duty of an evangelist, nor do they give thought the mental load it entails. These same people want to complain on Sunday morning that they didn't get much out of the preachers sermon. Members who expect the preacher to carry on the work of an elder/deacon and (spend most of his time serving tables) can **not** to have worthwhile sermons too. The preacher simply cannot do both. A preachers effort behind the pulpit is directly connected to whether he spends enough time in his study.

Any preacher worth his salt will spend may hours in study daily. It is no simple task keeping up with the false doctrines that have made headway into the churches today. He will spend much time in prayer not just for himself but for others also. Then there is the preparation of his sermons and bible class lessons. This is not to mention any article writing or radio program or other lessons he may have to prepare for.

What about any classes he may be taking to further his knowledge and understanding. How about the time he may spend helping others who come to him needing help in their understand of Gods word.

A preachers work is not a nine to five job it is a way of life to the true preacher of Gods word. What about the preacher who holds down a full time job in the secular world to make ends meet because the congregation where he serves can not afford to pay him or because there is no support from other places to care of his needs.

People, especially Christians need to understand that the preacher is already carrying a heavy load and that he does so out of love for God and his fellow man. To place the burden of the the elders and deacons and even the congregation upon his shoulders is asking far too much of these men.

In the words of Irven Lee a faithful brother from Toney, Alabama.

*There is a message that should be carefully delivered to every person in all the world. This enormous task is the work of preachers as God ordained it (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15,16; Luke 24:47). There is an urgency about getting the message delivered, and the preacher should grasp the seriousness of his this (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Paul used many expressions to remind the Ephesian elders of his attitude toward preaching: "what manner," "humility of mind," "many tears," "temptations," and of how he "kept back nothing that was profitable." He could claim that he was pure from the blood of all men because he shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:17-35). He did not preach for the money at Ephesus. In fact, he earned his own money and funds for the care of his helpers while he was there. He knew that his work of preaching was important.*

*Paul and Silas "suffered" and were "shamefully entreated" at Philippi, but they went right on to Thessalonica and were "bold" to speak the "gospel of God." It was this bold presentation of the truth in such a way as to be well pleasing to God, rather than flattery and other men pleasing tactics, that they depended on to get the job done. They were allowed by God to be put in trust with the gospel so there was a feeling that they were debtors to others (1 Thess. 2:1-13).*

Friends, There is a lot of time that goes into preparing two sermons and two or three classes per week. There is the special preparation for each of these lessons, and there is a lot of general reading and constant

efforts to grow in background knowledge. Some who do not know

what the preachers work truly is might benefit by going with him for a week and observing how many questions are asked on many different subjects. One never knows what subjects will be brought up. We are to be ready always to give answer (1 Peter 3:15).

## ***The Elders***

An Elder is a man who first must meet the qualifications set forth in the scriptures. Today, do to lack of teaching and desire many churches do not have elders. Those fortunate enough to have them are often under the misconception that the elders are the bosses of the congregation and therefore what they say is law. Yet there are still others who believe that elders are simply figure heads and have little or no duty at all in workings of the church. Like the preacher the elder in reality understands he will be held more accountable than others and is willing to serve God to the best of his ability.

I believe brother Dub McClish might have explained the eldership in terms that all can understand. I quote: *“Elderships are God’s wall of defense for His church—accountable for congregational welfare and safety—and are directly responsible to God for that which is taught in the classrooms, the pulpit, the church bulletin, and all other teaching media they supply. They need not do all of the teaching personally (impossible even in an average-size congregation), but **they must know what is being taught.** This knowledge includes the material that is used and that which is taught in the Bible classes. Also, elders need to know that the teachers are both morally and doctrinally sound. They must do this by personal interview, written questionnaire, or some other means, or be guilty of grave neglect.*

*They dare not merely assume that all is well in these matters. It is their business as overseers and pastors to find out—to know.”*

Keep in mind if a congregation has no elders it is Not the responsibility of the preacher to lead or shepherd the flock in their absence. Till elders can be found the men of the congregation should do their best to meet regularly and keep the congregation informed of what is going on and make sure the Lords work is continuing forward.

Qualified elders are a necessity for the well-being of church. Titus was told to "ordain elders in every city" (Tit. 1:5). Paul, on the return trip of his first missionary journey, appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). So we clearly see churches are to have elders. God has assigned the role of elders not man. This is a grave responsibility and not to be taken lightly. Those who take this position lightly, treat it as some kind of glorified bosses position rather than as a work to be done. The scriptures teach otherwise "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1).

Those who look at the Eldership as a means of control are Not motivated for the right reasons. A lack of study and teaching has misguided not just elders but also congregations who look upon their work as that of a board of directors or the like. Some even among the faithful look at the position as a means of gaining power over others and nothing could be further from the truth. Of course elders are to make decisions, however, there are other important things elders are to do. We should thank God for those men who have the ability to be elders and accept the responsibility to serve the Lord.

Once scriptural qualifications are met it is a must for an elder to have the ability to lead. The Bible states, "Obey them that have the rule over you . . ." (Heb. 13:17). The word, "rule," in this passage signifies



"to go before, to show the way, to guide, to lead. We must remember

that in scripture elders is always plural. These men should meet on a regular basis and not worry about time limits or huddling for a few minutes in the corner somewhere hoping to come to agreement on matters of the church. Elders are to rule diligently (Rom. 12:8) and not slothfully (Rom. 12:11).

It has been said "A leader sees three things: what ought to be done, what can be done, and how to do it." These are qualities we should look for in an elder. Let us look at some of the duties of the elders.

God gave elders the authority to rule the church, but this does not preclude distributing work to the other members. In fact, delegation of responsibility must be made to others if the work is to get done. This is good leadership. A good leader has a harmonious relation with his followers. He takes them into his confidence and at times asks their advice. In addition to being leaders, elders are shepherds or pastors of God's flock. Paul told the Ephesian elders "to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28, NASB). Peter exhorted elders to "shepherd the flock of God among you. . ." (1 Pet. 5:2, NASB). The King James has "feed" instead of "shepherd." Feed the flock. One of the qualifications of an elder is "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2). This indicates that he must know the Scriptures and be able to nurture and strengthen those whom he watches over.

A good shepherd watches for the spiritual safety of their flock and if one wanders off and becomes lost the shepherd leaves the flock and searches for the lost sheep until he finds it (Lk. 15:46). The Hebrew writer proclaims that elders "watch for you souls. . ." (Heb. 13:17) Good Elders/Shepherds will protect the flock from predators. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also

of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch. . ." (Acts 20:29-31).

Elders must be careful as to what preacher they secure to fill the pulpit. Good churches have been ruined by preachers seeking to spread false doctrine. Shepherds must know the truth and be able to see the ways in which error has a way of creeping in to lessons from the pulpit. The scriptures teach elders are to be examples to the flock. Peter exhorts elders, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). In Hebrews, the inspired writer says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Heb. 13:7). Elders must go before the congregation demonstrating New Testament Christianity and how it is to be practiced.

Elders must demonstrate how to get along with people. They must be willing to listen to others when they have suggestions or problems, and respond with respect and appreciation. They must show that there can be matters of disagreement over opinions without losing their temper and becoming angry. Elders are not to be soon angry (Tit. 1:7).

To quote H. E. Phillips. *"The responsibility of the elders is continued from day to day in the congregation over which they rule. They have not been appointed to 'let another do the work' of overseeing and tending the flock, because only elders can do the work of elders. The sooner elders realize their duties and respond to them the sooner the church will begin to grow spiritually and numerically in every city of this great country"* (Scriptural Elders and Deacons, p. 189).

# *The Deacons*

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Phil. 1: 1). Deacons, and bishops/elders, stand out among the saints. These men become deacons in a congregation by selection and appointment of the brethren. They are not picked by the elders or the preacher, but by the congregation. They are selected to serve on behalf of the church.

As with elders, Deacons are a rare find in the church today. The qualifications are specifically set forth in I Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3. It should come as no surprise that this work requires “wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Acts, chapter 6, shows that the work of deacons is of a material nature in the church. The deacons function is in the area of what we call benevolence physical matters in the church. The deacons make the decisions as to the How any and all physical matters are executed. The elders determine WHO and WHAT and the deacons decide the HOW.

Over the years deacons have received the short end of the stick so to speak. Committees have been formed taking over the work that deacons are charged to do. Elders often do the work that deacons should do and still other times the preacher assumes the work of the deacon. Thus the consequence is that deacons are left without any responsibility. They become nothing more than figureheads-men with a title, and nothing to do. Some think the deacon is one that only takes care of the menial task of the church. While it is the work of the deacon to see that such things as the mowing and upkeep of the grounds are done and that the building is cleaned and cared for they also share the task of things such as ushering, helping with baptisms, preparation of the lords table and in its service. Deacons also are to be

part of administering to the looking after of widows, orphans and poor. These are parts of the work of the deacons. The preparation of the building-heating or ventilating must be done. There is an unlimited amount of work to be done by these men.

The nature of the deacons work might be likened to that illustrated by the function of the six men chosen to provide for the needs of the Hellenistic widows in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). This “multitude of the disciples” was instructed to choose men and then to appoint them over such business so that the apostles could “give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” This can also show us that the work of deacons should be to allow the overseers time to deal with the spiritual matters of the congregation.

It is unfortunate but, the responsibility of deacons to look after the care of the needy has been overlooked in our day and age. One of the main reason for this is we now institutionalize our needy and to this extent we have left deacons with little to do in this aspect of their duty. It seems gone are the days when the deacons saw to the needy widows of the church. Some churches today in order to ease their minds now just send a donation to some institution and let them handle the matter when in all truth it is the obligation of the church. So, why even appoint deacons if we are not going to permit them to do the work that God intended for them to do?

Deacons often have little or nothing to do because elders the seem to think they need to do all the work and they fail delegate such work to the deacons. Elders who tend the flock and and who are exercising proper oversight in exhorting sound doctrine and convicting the gainsayers have more than enough to do. The personal caring for the needy who are the obligation of the church rightfully falls to the deacon. Deacons need to let the elders do the ruling, and elders need to let the deacons do the serving, so that elders in turn may devote themselves to their duties, and not be burdened down serving tables.

This is God's plan, and it will work if we use it. Keep in mind they were selected by the “multitude of the disciples” which indicates that each church should select its own deacons and to appoint them over such business. It also indicates that they were given the authority to act, and to make decisions in regard to the specific details involved in discharging their duties.

## ***No Elders, No Deacons, Just A Preacher?***

Unfortunately many churches especially the smaller congregation's of today have no elders or deacons at all. This is not to say that churches without elders and deacons can not exist and work but they should never be content to stay that way. The lack of teaching our men from a young age the importance of upright living and a true love of God and the church has led to a real shortage of qualified men to fill these positions. This is how pawning off all the work on the preacher got started. If there are no elders and deacons then this duty in part must fall to the men of the congregation.

### **So now the question must be asked what is to be done?**

Since there are areas in the church where we have the right, and the need, of deciding what to do. Certain matters of expediency in carrying out the work of a local congregation must be addressed. Decisions must be made for the efficient, continuing and successful functioning church. As an example: teaching is necessary (Eph. 4:11-16). It is the work God "gave" the church. So, who is to teach? How are the classes to function? What materials will be chosen to use? None of this is outlined in the Bible. God gave the church the work to be done but He did not spell out the details or the means or expedients by which to do

so this is a function of the elders and deacons. There are many things that must be planned and arranged that are not matters of faith, but rather, matters of expediency hence we have business meetings to decide such matters.

There is no specific command that I can find for a congregation's men to conduct a business meeting. No outline of any kind of procedure to follow when conducting said meeting. We do know that as Christians all things must be done "decently and in order." So this is where things get dicey so to speak, because most want to dump it all in the preachers lap and we have seen already that this is not his position to take. So, we necessarily infer that some manner of deciding the business of the church must be arranged. This is far from the scriptural example given but still necessary.

There is only one incident I know of that comes close to what we call today the "business meeting." This would be the meeting of the Jerusalem brethren to consider the needs of Grecian Jewish widows who had been neglected (Acts 6:1-3). The text says, V2: Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. V3: Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. We see action was taken and the results were immediately apparent. This example though different in some aspects I believe might be a model for us to follow in holding meetings in the churches of today. These brethren were not brought together just to talk, they met in order to take appropriate action to remedy the problem.

There is an outline that may be followed that is a good example of what should be the practice in meetings where serious problems requiring immediate attention can be dealt with. This scenario is what the apostles and brethren of the first century did when faced with some important questions:

- First define the problem. Be sure that all present understand the problem. Allow suggested solutions by all to be put forward. This

will put the concerted wisdom of the group toward solving that problem. Everyone needs to have a voice in the matter and should be listened to thoughtfully and without negative comment. Allowing a free exchange of ideas is the goal. Discuss all the alternatives to see if they actually solve the problem or create other difficulties. A consensus is what is being sought.

Remember the teaching of 1 Corinthians 1:10 - "that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. " We know the Lord commanded this of us "His" people, and that it is possible!

Develop the plan and then assign those responsible to put the plan into effect. Carry through on the plan immediately. Anything worth doing is worth doing right. And if it is worth doing right, then it is worth doing right then! If we only talk of business, then we are, in effect not holding business meetings at all. The result of our meetings has to be prompt, decisive action, then and only then - are we following the apostolic examples.

## ***The Congregation***

The first thing we need to clarify is that the congregation is **YOU**. The church the assembly the congregation is made up of individuals. Most of the work Christians are commanded to do is individual work.

In New Testament we find no other organization through which members can work other than that of the local congregation. Most of the work of a Christian is, and rightly ought to be, individual work.

Like the deacons we are to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. Often times there are those in the hospital that need encouragement their families may need help with meals or even child care. Of course we are all under the great commission to preach and teach the gospel to all creation. Congregations are made up of individuals, and the whole congregation is benefited by the work of its members.

In all actuality there is little for the congregation to do as a whole other than assemble for worship and study. The real power you might say is the work of the individual outside the assembly. We need to understand individual responsibility to God is one thing that is emphasized in the New Testament.

Far too often congregations do absolutely nothing more than what you might call "house keeping." Members faithfully attend public worship services, and engage in all the proper acts of worship, and then go home "till the next time they meet." When these members are asked why the congregation is not growing, they blame everything but themselves. We can not simply say to the world "Here is the gospel come and get it our doors are open." When do this we only give lip service to the Lord and when others do not show up for worship services, we can not somehow feel that our duty has been discharged

simply because we open the building doors. Jesus said, "Go into all the world." He did not say, "Invite the world and if they don't come, you are excused." Our responsibility is to take the gospel out of the building to the world around us. It is called evangelism.

I have always thought that "the gospel meeting" was designed to win the lost to Christ. Today we seem to meticulously schedule these



meetings so that they will not be in conflict with other meetings in the area or with secular events like ball games or premiers of new movies and the like. My question is (Why?) Is it because we think those in the world will not come if other meetings are being conducted the same time or that some worldly event will over shadow it?

Today it seems our meeting are only filled with those from near by congregation and this should not be. The gospel meet is meant to draw the lost not the saved. So here is another work for the congregation go out bring those in the world into the tent help them realize their lost condition and give them hope through Christ. Have forgotten our primary purpose in having a "gospel meeting?"

Numerous passages can be cited on the way God's people work. A study of the scriptures reveal that the greatest portion of Gods intended work for the Christian is to come from the individual doing their personal work. No one can do this work for us. The local church can only do so much as a whole and it can not relieve us of the personal responsibility we have to the Lord. Please pay close attention to the following verses.

*"Every tree is known by his own fruit" (Lk. 6:44), and "every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" (Jn. 15:2). "Let every man prove his own work, . . . for every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal.4:5). The burden of doing the works of God is upon every Christian. Paul "exhorted and comforted and charged every one" of the Thessalonians how to "walk worthy of God" (1 Thess. 2:11). To the Colossians he was "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom,, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). Why? Because every man must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10) to give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:12) who shall judge "according to every man's work" (1 Pet. 1: 17; Rev. 20:12-13), rewarding them accordingly (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6).*

The question now is answered the Christian must be involved personally in God's work. It is a must! When and if we **fail** to do the work required of us on a personal basis it is a disastrous situation (Matt. 25:4, 18, 45-46), ignorance of this work is unacceptable. God ordained the works and he has made them known to us (Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

I sincerely hope and pray this will help guide you to a better understanding on these topics. May God richly bless you in your studies and your life.

Jim Miller