

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

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I. DISCUSSION

1. First, passages which speak of the organization of the local church, Ac.14:21-23; 20:17,28-30; Eph.4:11,12; Phil.1:1; 1Th.5:12; Tit.1:5; Heb.13:17; 1Pet.5:1-4.
2. In God's arrangements, no room is left for improvement; this is true in both the physical and the spiritual realm.
 - a. In the physical realm:
 - (1) Artificial light is never as good as sunlight.
 - (2) The human body – the arrangement is simple in a sense – yet perfect.
 - (a) Improvements (?) an atheist suggested: “Put an eye in the tip of the finger so one could see around a corner.”
 - (b) But what if a carpenter missed the nail and hit his finger?!
 - (3) Vitamins and minerals – natural vs. synthetic.
 - (4) God's natural laws can't be improved upon – they must be observed or suffer the consequences.
 - b. In the spiritual realm:
 - (1) The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul,” Psa.19:7.
 - (2) The gospel is perfect – need the same gospel today, preached in the same way as in the 1st century. See Gal.1:6-9.
 - (3) The conditions of salvation can't be improved upon.
 - (4) God's promises are as good now as in N.T. days, Ac.2:36-38; 2Pet.3:9; 1Pet.1:3-5.
 - (5) The Lord's church, Mt.16:18. Cf. Mt.15:13 – same now.
3. Likewise, there is no room for improvement on **the organization of the church**.
 - a. This we shall discuss in this lesson.
 - b. What we propose to show: What it is; What its limitations are; How it is perverted.

II. DISCUSSION

A. FIRST WE DISCUSS THE N.T. USE OF THE WORD “CHURCH”.

1. It is used in the *universal sense*, i.e., including all the saved; the saved in the aggregate – all who have believe and obeyed the gospel.
 - a. Examples: Mt.16:18; Eph.1:22,23; 3:10; 5:23-25.
 - b. In this sense, it is always spoken of in the singular; there is only one belonging to Christ.
 - c. Christ is its head; the apostles are his ambassadors; there is no other organization in the universal sense; no other officers; no work assigned; no universal or brotherhood treasury; no earthly or brotherhood headquarters, etc.
 - d. There is no example of decision being made or action being taken by the universal church; it is not a functional unit. All decisions and actions were either:
 - (1) Congregational, i.e., by the local church acting collectively, Ac.6:1-6; 11:22; 13:1-3; 15:22.
 - (2) Or by the individual Christian acting as an individual, Ac.9:36; 18:24-26; 1Tim.5:16.
 - e. No man or group of men can scripturally act for or on behalf of the brotherhood or the church universal or any part thereof.
2. Also, the word “church” is used in the *local sense*, i.e., including all of God’s people in one community or one congregation – those saved by believing and obeying the gospel in one community or one congregation.
 - a. Examples: Ac.14:21-23; Rom.16:16; 1Cor.1:1,2; Phil.1:1.
 - b. The local church or local congregation:
 - (1) Is composed of saints – of baptized believers – who have mutually agreed to work together as God directed, Ac.9:26-28; 20:17-32; Eph.4:11-16.
 - (2) Assembles for various reasons, Rom.16:5; 1Cor.11:18; Heb.10:25.
 - (a) General worship, Ac.2:42.
 - (b) Preaching and teaching, Ac.11:26.
 - (c) Prayer, Ac.12:5,12.
 - (d) To hear reports of preachers, Ac.14:26,27.
 - (e) To consider controversial matters, Ac.15:4, 12,22,30.
 - (f) To partake of the Lord’s Supper, Ac.20:7; 1Cor.11:17-34.
 - (g) To exercise discipline, 1Cor.5:4,5.

- (h) To plan for the church's benevolent work among the saints, Ac.6:1-6.
 - (i) To ordain or appoint qualified men to be elders or to take the oversight of the local church, Ac.14:21-23; Tit.1:5-11; 1Tim.3:1-7; 1Pet.5:1-3.
- (3) Is organized, Phil.1:1; Eph.4:11,12; 1Tim.1:3; Tit.1:5 – with elders, deacons and saints and evangelists. There is no divine authority for:
- (a) Governing committees.
 - (b) Sunday school organizations (for Bible classes, but not Sunday school organizations.
 - (c) Cell groups, etc.
- (4) Functions collectively, 1Tim.5:16; Eph.4:12,16; 1Cor.16:1-3; Phil.4:15,16; 2Cor.11:8; Ac.11:27-30.
- (5) Is independent, and:
- (a) Is separately ruled.
 - (1) If there are elders, they rule only the flock among them; their rule or their oversight is limited to the flock where they are elders, Ac.20:28; 1Pet.5:1-3.
 - (a) Note: “Almost two years have passed since this congregation agreed to assume the oversight of the work in the inner city area of Kansas City. This is a cooperative effort of a number of sister congregations in the metropolitan area, assisted by other congregations and individuals outside the area.” – F. Douglas Jones, Tidings, Vol. XIII, No.24, June 18, 1974, Bulletin, Overland Park Church of Christ, 103rd and Antioch, Overland Park, Kansas 66212. (Jones was one of the elders of that church)
 - (2) If there are no elders, the brethren guide the affairs of their own congregation, Ac. 11:27-30; 13:1-3; 14:26,27.
 - (b) Is separately responsible for its own discipline, 1Cor.5:4,5; 2Cor.2:6-9; 2Th.3:6.

- (c) Is separately responsible for its own faithfulness, Rev.2:1,5; 1Cor.11:17-34.
- (d) Each congregation does its own work, Phil.4:15,16; Ac.11:27-30; 1Cor.16:1-3; 2Cor.8:1-5,23.
- (6) Is the only functioning organization on this earth authorized by the N.T. as a part of the Lord's church to do the work God assigned the church, Phil.1:1.
- c. There are no examples of and no N.T. authority – no book, chapter and verse authority – for:
 - (1) A confederation of a plurality of churches into one body, to act as a body in any field of endeavor.
 - (2) A confederation of the elders of several churches into one body, to deliberate as a body for anyone or anything.
 - (3) The elders of one congregation exercising rule or oversight in another congregation, even if asked by that congregation to do so.
 - (4) One church being the agent through which other local churches can operate in any field of endeavor.
 - (a) There were no Sponsoring Churches or Sponsoring Eldership in N.T. churches in N.T. days.
 - (b) There is no authority for such today.
 - (c) In evangelistic work one church always sent support **directly to** the preacher in the field. Or a plurality of churches always sent support **directly to** the preacher in the field in congregational cooperation.
 - (d) In evangelistic work no church ever sent support to a preacher **through another church.**
 - (e) In benevolent work in supplying the wants of needy saints either one church or a plurality of churches always sent **relief** for needy saints **directly to** the church with more needy saints that it had funds to relieve their needs.
 - (f) In benevolent work no church ever sent **relief through** one church as the sponsoring church to relieve the wants of needy saints.

- (g) Agency of necessity involves dependency, one acting for or representing another, proxy, and centralization of churches for which there is no N.T. authority. All local churches are independent and equal. They are autonomous.

B. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IS PLAIN, SIMPLE AND THE SUBJECT OF DIVINE ORACLE, Phil.1:1.

(Discuss each one):

1. Elders, Bishops, or Pastors, one and the same thing.
 - a. There must be a plurality of elders in each congregation (if there are qualified men in the congregation), Ac.14:21-23; 15:2,4; 16:4; 20:17; Phil.1:1; Tit.1:5.
 - b. Qualifications of elders, 1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:5-9.
 - c. Duties or work of elders (what they are to do; where they are to do it; the limitations of their oversight):
 - (1) Take heed to selves and the flock where they are elders, Ac.20:28.
 - (2) Feed and oversee the flock among them, 1Pet.5:3. Cf. 1Th.5:12.
 - (3) Be ensamples to the flock, 1Pet.5:3.
 - (4) Guard the doctrine, Tit.1:9; “apt to teach,” 1Tim.3:2.
 - (5) Rule the local church, Heb.13:17 (marg. “guide”).
 - (6) Guard souls of members, Heb.13:17.
 - d. The perpetuity of the eldership:
 - (1) It is contended by some that the eldership of the local church belonged to the miraculous age of the church and passed away with the miraculously endowed members. BUT IF SO, ONE OF TWO CONCLUSIONS MUST FOLLOW.
 - (a) Either both the duties and works done by elders have also ceased. Have they?
 - (b) Or such works are placed upon others. BUT, IF SO, WHO? PROOF?
 - (2) Are 1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:5-9; Ac.20:28; 1Th.5:12; Heb.13:17; 1Pet.5:1-3 of no use now?? IF SO:
 - (a) Why given at the time? Why not 33 A.D. in stead of 65 to 67 A.D. or later?
 - (b) Space should have been used to teach the discontinuing of elders instead of the qualifications!

- e. The authority of elders:
 - (1) Is confined to the membership of the congregation where they are elders.
 - (a) Their authority, oversight and work are local.
 - (b) Congregational autonomy must be recognized – Explain: “autos” + “nomos” = self-law; self-rule; self-government
 - (1) Cf. Automatic = self-acting.
 - (2) Automobile = self-mobile.
 - (c) Wisdom of such noted. One has no authority over another. Thus one cannot unduly influence another.
 - (2) Does not allow them to make laws; they are under law, not law makers.
 - (a) Jesus Christ is the law giver, Deut.18:18,19; Mt.28:18; Eph.1:22,23; 1Pet.2:33; Ac.3:22,23; Heb.1:1,2.
 - (b) Elders are to see that Christ’s law is taught and obeyed in the congregation where they are elders.
 - (c) Sometimes some of them try to see to everything but this!!
2. Deacons.
- a. “Deacon” is equal to “servant” or “special servant”.
 - b. Qualifications, 1Tim.3:8-13.
 - c. There must be a plurality of deacons in each local church, if there are qualified men.
 - d. It’s the duty of deacons to assist the elders and do what ever called on to do in serving the church in its work.
 - e. Serving as a deacon is good training to qualify for an elder. Cf. 1Tim.3:13.
3. Saints or other members of the local church.
- a. Duties to Christ come first, Mt.28:18-20; 6:33; Eph.5:24; Lk.6:46; Mt.10:37-39; 16:24,25.
 - b. Duties to elders:
 - (1) To know them (recognize and appreciate), 1Th.5:12.
 - (2) To esteem them highly in love, 1Th.5:13.
 - (3) To count them worthy of double honor when occasion requires it, 1Tim.5:17; cf. v.18.

- (4) To receive no accusation against them except from 2 or 3 witnesses, 1Tim.5:19.
- (5) To obey and submit to them, Heb.13:17; cf. 1Cor.11:1
- (6) To rebuke them when they need rebuking, 1Tim.5:19,20.
- c. Duties to one another, Eph.4:32; 1Th.5:11; 1Jno.4:7,8.
- d. Duties to the lost. Cf. Rom.1:14,15.
- e. Duties to families, Eph.6:1-4.

C. THE LOCAL CHURCH IS GOD'S ONLY ORGANIZED UNIT TO DO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AND IS SUFFICIENT FOR DOING THE WORK WHICH GOD REQUIRES THE CHURCH TO DO.

1. If the local church in its congregational capacity or the local churches in their congregational capacity can't do the work without some kind of centralized confederation of churches, it is not a work God has ordained local churches to do.
2. There is no organization larger, none smaller, and none larger than the local church.
3. The local church is the only organization authorized in the N.T. – hence, if it is not sufficient:
 - a. The N.T. is not sufficient.
 - b. If the N.T. is not sufficient, God can't be relied on.
4. The local church is the only medium through which early Christians worked collectively to do the work of the local church.
 - a. Apostolic churches are our models, so far as they followed the divine plan.
 - (1) Question: Did they follow or deviate from the divine plan in doing God's work through the local church?
 - b. Obviously they did follow it. Now take note of their success, Rom.1:8; 10:18; Col.1:23; etc.
5. What is the work of the local church? What is its mission?
 - a. Preaching to save the lost.
 - b. Self-edification.
 - c. Taking care of its needy saints.
 - d. Its work is not social in nature.
 - e. Entertainment belongs to the home, not to the church.
 - f. It is not to build, maintain, contribute to, or operate other businesses or organizations, no matter what their nature.

D. IN VIEW OF THESE EVIDENT TRUTHS, WE ARE COMPELLED TO RAISE THESE QUESTIONS:

1. Where is the scriptural authority for the church preaching the gospel through an organization other than the local church?
 - a. There is none?
 - b. The local church is the only organization authorized.
 - c. Thus, the M.S. is unauthorized.
2. Where is the scriptural authority for any church doing its benevolent work through any organization other than the local church?
 - a. There is none?
 - b. Thus, human B.S. are unauthorized.
 - c. The local church may buy the services of, but not build, maintain, contribute to, owe or operate human organizations of any kind to do anything. (Explain and illustrate)
3. If one work of the church can be done through another organization, why can't all of them be? They could! Apply!
4. If any part of any work of the church can be done through another organization, why can't all of that work be done that way?
5. Where these works – Evangelism and Benevolence – done in the days of the apostles? Yes! Note.
6. What organization other than the local church did they employ to do these works? What was its name? Where was it located? Who headed it? Book, chapter and verse???
7. Where is the scriptural authority for the “Sponsoring Church” set up; such as, the Herald of Truth? the Lubbock Plan, etc?
 - a. There is none!
 - b. The organization of the church will not allow it. It requires an organization of the church the N.T. does not authorize.
 - c. It perverts the function of the elders.
8. Where is the scriptural authority for churches sending “through” other churches?
 - a. There is none.
 - b. They sent “to” other churches, but not “through”.
 - c. But they did this only in benevolent work.
 - d. In evangelistic work they sent directly to the preacher, never to or through another church.
9. Where is the scriptural authority for:
 - a. Ministers of Education or Educational Directors?
 - b. Youth Ministers?
 - c. Campus Ministers or Campus Interns sponsored by churches?

- d. Ministers of Busing?
- e. Missionaries, as opposed to gospel preachers or evangelists? Modern missionaries often establish missions.
- f. Bible Chairs and Christian Student Centers operated by churches (such as set up and operated by the South National church of Christ in Springfield, Mo)? There is none!
- g. Youth Rallies? Youth churches? Youth services separate from adult services?

III. DISCUSSION

1. We have no more right to depart from the N.T. organization of the church than we have to depart from:
 - a. The N.T. plan of salvation.
 - b. The N.T. plan of worship.
 - c. The N.T. action and design of baptism.
 - d. The N.T. plan of holy living.
 - e. The N.T. plan for giving to support the work of the church.
2. What good will it do to hold to most of the Lord's will if we depart from some of it? cf. Jas.2:10.
3. In order to be well-pleasing to God, we must maintain this divine pattern of organization. Those not doing so are not well-pleasing to God, and we can't afford to fellowship them in their apostasy!!