

LOCAL CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Lesson 1

I. INTRODUCTION.

A. Why Study Local Church Organization?

1. Positively, we want to have the orderly arrangement that God wants for a local church and we want to follow the NT pattern of organization to achieve that goal.
2. Negatively, we want to avoid the many religious apostasies that have begun with unscriptural church organization.

B. Why Organization?

No group, small or large, secular or religious, can exist for the good of others without some sort of organization. A group of people without proper organization will be ineffective or will soon self-destruct. A good example of this is found in Acts 19.

II. "CHURCH" IN THE NT.

A. What "Church Organization" Are We Discussing?

B. There Are Two Uses of the Word "Church" in the NT.

1. "Church" (Gr. *ekklesia*; to *call* out; called out [ones]) refers to an assembly of saved people who have been called out of darkness to be saints, by God, from heaven, through the gospel, into the body of Christ. The Greek word *ekklesia* is a collective noun used for an assembly of people. It refers to people, not a building (Mt. 18:17; Acts 8:3; etc.). It is used in the NT for the assembly of Israel (Ac.7:38; Heb. 2:12), the assembly of Ephesian citizens (Ac.19:32, 39), and the assembly of Christians. One Christian is not a "church".
2. In the NT, the word "church" is used in a universal sense — all the saved, everywhere, of all time. The influence of the universal "church" is exerted upon the world as each Christian carries out his or her individual responsibilities while following Christ. Examples of the universal sense of the word can be found in Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10; 5:23; 1 Timothy 3:15; etc. There is no church organization on earth in the universal sense. Hence, there is no mission to meet, no duty to fulfill as a functional entity, and no single agency (headquarters) which tries to activate or organize the church universal. There is a "brotherhood" (1 Pet.2:17), but not a "church-hood". The universal church is not an organization of churches.
3. In the NT, the word "church" is used in a local sense — all the saved in one location. The location may be one's own house, a single city, or a region. Examples of the local sense of the word can be found in Acts 8:1; 9:31; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Cor. 8:1; Galatians 1:2, 22; Philemon 2; etc. A local "church" is an assembly of saints functioning *collectively* in divinely authorized work and worship. There is local church organization. This is the only functional, organizational unit of Christians. The

NT mentions no other. Anything *larger* than, *smaller* than, or *other* than this local church unit is unscriptural. The organization of the church begins and ends with the local church.

4. References to "church" (Gr. *ekklesia*) in the NT: Mt. 16:18; 18:17 (2x); Acts 2:47; 5:11; 7:38; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:2, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39, 41; 20:17, 28; Rom. 16:1, 4, 5, 16, 23; 1 Cor. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 10:32; 11:16, 18, 22; 12:28; 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33, 34, 35; 15:9; 16:1, 19 (2x); 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:1, 18, 19, 23, 24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Gal. 1:2, 13, 22; Eph. 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32; Phil. 3:6; 4:15; Col. 1:18, 24; 4:15, 16; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:1, 4; 1 Tim. 3:5, 15; 5:16; Philemon 2; Heb. 2:12; 12:23; Jas. 5:14; 3 Jn. 6, 9, 10; Rev. 1:4, 11, 20 (2x); 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16.

C. Saying "Church Organization" Confuses the Issue. It is Best to Speak of "Local Church Organization."

III. LOCAL CHURCH ORGANIZATION.

A. What Is Organization?

1. "Organization" simply means "proper working order", "an organized body", "organic structure", or "systematic arrangement". While the word "organization" is not found in the NT, the concept is implied various times. The words "ordain" or "appoint" (1 Cor. 7:17; 11:34; 16:1; Tit. 1:5), "order" (Tit. 1:5), and "fitly framed" (Eph. 2:21; 4:16) all imply "arrangement" and "order". These words speak to the concept of organization.
2. The question of "organization" (structure) is separate from issues about the work, methods, arrangements, or expediencies found within a local church. What is often called a "method" by religious people is actually a violation of NT "organization". We cannot change the organization (structure) of the local church and call it a "method" of work.
3. Proper organization is achieved when all the members of a local church are fulfilling the proper roles found in Ephesians 4:11-12 and Philippians 1:1. The only two roles in Ephesians 4:11 not found in the local church today are "apostles" and "prophets."

B. Organization Allows the Local Church To Be...

1. Orderly.

Each local church can and must be "set in order" (Tit. 1:5). God wants order, not confusion in the local assembly (1 Cor. 14:33,40). There is to be no disorganization in God's plan.

2. Autonomous.

Each local church is "autonomous" (lit. self-law). That is, each local church governs or rules itself using the NT as its law. Each local church is independent and not controlled from any outside human source, including other local churches.

Examples of the independent and autonomous nature of the local church can be found in Acts 14:23, 20:28, 1 Corinthians 16:3, 2 Corinthians 8:19, 23, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Tit.1:5, and 1 Peter 5:2. A local church does not *legislate* [make] or *judge* [interpret] God's law. It simply *executes* [carries out] God's law. Local churches function and do their work independently of each other, not *through* each other. There is to be no inter-congregational or multi-congregational structure in God's plan.

3. Equal.

Each local church is equal. There are no distinctions such as "contributing churches", "sponsoring churches," "mission churches", "mother churches," etc. There is no hierarchy structure for local churches in God's plan.

4. All-sufficient.

- a) Each local church is wholly sufficient to do the work God has given it to do whether it be evangelizing the lost, benevolence toward needy saints, or edification of saints. A local church can do its work without any other organization being built. Local churches are not to build and maintain human institutions through which to do their work.
- b) A local church uses money from its own treasury to do its own work. A treasury is an authorized expediency to keep the Lord's money together (Acts 4:37; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).
- c) The church at Antioch is a NT example of a local church which was all-sufficient to do its own work — Acts 11:26; 14:27-28; 15:30-35 (edification); 11:27-30 (benevolence); and 13:1-3 (evangelism).
- d) Other examples of local churches being all-sufficient in their work can be found here: Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37; 6:1-6; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Timothy 5:16 (benevolence); Acts 11:22-23; 1 Corinthians 9:14; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; Philippians 1:5; 2:25; 4:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8 (evangelism); and Acts 2:47; 20:28,32; 1 Corinthians 12:22-27; 14:12,26; Ephesians 4:16; 1 Peter 2:2 (edification). There is no weak or insufficient structure in God's plan for the local church. His plan for the local church is perfect and must be followed carefully.
- e) Note that local churches in the NT were all-sufficient to do the work of evangelism, benevolence (toward needy saints only, see passages above), and edification. They did not engage in any other works. There was no work or mission that involved social and recreational activities. Local churches did not spend the Lord's money from the treasury to engage in works involving youth camps, gymnasiums, fellowship halls for social meals, play grounds, ball teams, recreational trips, etc. And, evangelism (through the word of God), benevolence (sent directly to the need), and edification (through the word of God) were just that, without also attaching social and recreational activities to them.

- f) Local churches were also all-sufficient to engage in worship to God. They assembled together on the first day of the week to take the Lord's supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34) and to give a free-will offering (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9). They assembled together as well to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; etc.), pray (Acts 12:5; 1 Thess. 5:17; etc.), and preach and teach the word of God (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 1 Cor. 14; etc.). They did not engage in any other acts of worship.
 - g) A special question: What relationship does the local church organization have with human organizations? A local church may buy services from human organizations (like buying electricity from an electric company) without operating human organizations. An individual Christian may also support or operate human organizations without the local church doing so.
- C. The Local Church is Not Organized for Worldly Honor, But for the Lord's Work (Service).
Local Church Organization is a Means to a Divine End.

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. Local Church Organization Shows God's Wisdom.
 - 1. Local church organization is simple, yet strong. It is small, yet sufficient. No other organizational arrangement is permitted by God's word, much less needed.
 - 2. Any effort to improve upon God's wisdom shows unbelief.
- B. Local Church Organization Should Be Achieved and Never Perverted.
 - 1. Let us strive to be what God's wants for a local church and not stop until we achieve that goal.
 - 2. Any satisfaction with more or less than the NT pattern, or a deviation from the NT pattern, means we have turned from God's ways to man's ways.

Lesson One Discussion

1. Give two reasons for a study of local church organization.
2. Why is organization important to any group of people?
3. "Church" comes from the Greek word *ekklesia* which means _____.
The word "church" is used in what two senses in the NT?
4. In what sense of the word "church" can we speak of "organization"?
5. What does "organization" mean?
6. How would you show that the local church has organization even though the word "organization" is not found in the NT?
7. Organization allows the local church to have what four characteristics?
8. Using the scriptures listed under III.B.2., list the words or phrases in those verses which demonstrate that a local church is autonomous (independent).
9. Using the example of the local church at Antioch, illustrate how the local church alone is all-sufficient to do the three-fold work that God gave it to do.
10. Why does God want a local church to be organized?
11. What are some things that happen when we do not achieve the organization of the local church, or we try to change the organization of the local church?