

KEEPING THE PURITY OF LOCAL CHURCH ORGANIZATION

Lesson 4

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Every Christian and Every Local Assembly (Church) of Christians Must Guard the Purity of the Local Church Organization Found in the NT Pattern.
- B. How Can We Keep the Purity of Local Church Organization?

II. EACH LOCAL CHURCH MUST...

- A. Follow the NT Pattern of Organization.
 - 1. There is a pattern for local church organization and this pattern must be followed. All NT patterns are important (2 Tim. 1:13; Heb. 8:5).
 - 2. The NT pattern of organization is this: each local church is orderly, autonomous, equal, and all-sufficient under the spiritual guidance of elders (review Lesson 1 III.B.).
 - 3. Many brethren have not studied and maintained the NT pattern of organization and thus have not kept the purity of local church organization.
- B. Understand Its Own Work.
 - 1. Understand that...
 - a) The "universal church" is a "brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17), not a "church-hood" made up of all local churches (review Lesson 1 II.B). It is not the work of one local church to bind all other local churches together.
 - b) There is no hierarchy of churches or hierarchy of men within churches (review Lesson 2 II. and III.). It is not the work of one local church to promote an inter-congregational (between, among) or intra-congregational (within, inside) structure with other local churches. It is also important to understand the social attitudes which led to these man-made structures (review Lesson 2 II.C. and III.G.).
 - c) The responsibility of a local church is not to do "a brotherhood work" (review Lesson 3 III. B. 1. b and c). It is not the work of the local church to assume a "brotherhood work" that it cannot perform alone.
 - d) When it is necessary for a local church to "cooperate", concurrent cooperation is cooperation, it is scriptural, and effective (review Lesson 3.1.C.). It is not work of the local church to engage in joint cooperation or collective action with other local churches; that is, pooling the resources of various local churches under the centralized control and oversight of one church (eldership) in order to cooperate together.
 - 2. Many religious people, and well-meaning brethren, have not understood the basic NT principles which keep local church organization pure.

C. Plan and Do Its Own Work.

1. Plan its own work.

- a) Each local church must exercise vision in planning its own work of evangelism, edification, and benevolence. It is best if this is done under the supervision of elders.
- b) Many local churches function simply to help execute the plans of other churches. In many cases, the work of many local churches is outlined and overseen by the elders of another church or a board of directors of an institution. There is no example of anything like this in the New Testament.

2. Do its own work.

- a) Each local church is all-sufficient to do its own work and it must do it. Local churches in NT times planned and executed their own work (review Lesson 1 III. B. 4.), and we can do it today. It is best if this is done under the supervision of elders.
 - b) Many local churches would rather send funds to other churches or institutions and let them in turn do their work for them (review Lesson 3 III. B. 1.).
3. Many local churches have not planned or executed their own work and this has hindered them from keeping the purity of local church organization.

D. Make Its Own Decisions in Matters of Expediency.

1. Each local church has been given some generic authority in the work, worship, and organization of the local church. When local churches are faced with such generic authority, each local church, and the local church alone, must decide the expediencies.
2. Examples expediencies: assemble on the first day of the week (Heb. 10:25; Ac. 20:7) — time? place?; sing (Eph. 5:19) — how many songs? song books?; benevolence (1 Tim. 5:16) — place? personnel? provisions?; etc.
3. Many local churches violate the autonomy of other local churches by making decisions for them and thereby do not keep the purity of local church organization. Some churches of Christ in one country will actually oversee the detailed affairs of other churches in other countries. For example, local churches in the United States have been known to own church buildings and church supplies among brethren overseas and decide how it's all to be used.

E. Control Its Own Resources.

1. Each local church must make the decisions about the use of its money from the treasury (1 Cor. 16:1-2). How much will we spend? What will we spend it on? Who will get it? When will they get it? Why will they get it? Where will it go?
2. When local churches turn their funds over to another church, the control of those funds is lost (review Lesson 3). In the NT, we find a transfer of funds directly to the

recipient, but there was no loss of control because each local church controlled its own funds before it reached the recipient.

3. Many local churches have lost control of their own resources by turning those resources over to “sponsoring churches” who in turn make decisions about that money. They have not kept the purity of local church organization.
- F. Do the Work Assigned by God to a Local Church, Not the Work Assigned to the Individual Christian.
1. There is a distinction between Christians assembled together in a "local church" and individual Christians. Examples: Mt. 18:15-17; Ac. 4:36-5:4; and 1 Tim. 5:8, 16. Failing to understand or maintain the difference between the work of the local church and the work of the individual Christian, has led many local churches to engage in all kinds of social and recreational works (the “social gospel”). These local churches often spend more time doing the work of the individual than the work of the local church.
 2. Here are a few works assigned to the individual Christian, but not to the local church: eating together (Acts 2:46; 1 Cor. 11:34); benevolence to all (Jas. 1:27; Gal. 6:10); work at a business (1 Thess. 4:11); marry and raise children (Eph. 5:22-6:4); and, support government (Rom. 13:1-7). The local church is "burdened" (1 Tim. 5:16) when it does the work assigned to the individual Christian.
 3. Many local churches assume that they should do what *every* Christian should do and thereby have perverted the work of the local church as well as the purity of the local church organization. Some churches of Christ build and maintain schools and colleges, fellowship halls, orphan homes, hospitals, youth camps, ball teams, recreational facilities, benevolent shelters, and publishing companies, all of which can be good works for the individual, but are not the assigned work of the local church.

III. CONCLUSION.

- A. Every Generation of Christians Must Take Care to Keep the Purity of NT Organization.
- B. There Is a Danger of Inheriting a Perverted Organizational Pattern from Previous Generations and Accepting It As the NT Pattern.
- C. May Each Christian Find His Place in Each Local Church. Get in Your Place, Stay in It, and Work Hard There!

Lesson Four Discussion

1. What is the best way to follow the NT pattern of local church organization?
2. List the four misunderstandings religious people have which have led them to pervert the NT pattern of local church organization.
3. Write the name of a NT city where a local church planned and executed its own work without working through another church or institution. Include the scripture reference. Use examples other than the example of Antioch. Give an example in the area of benevolence, evangelism, and edification.
4. What is "generic authority" and what is an "expediency"? May one local church make decisions for another local church?
5. In the NT, we have examples of local churches making a _____ of funds to other churches, but we do not find them turning over the _____ of funds to other churches.
6. T or F — A local church may do whatever a Christian may do. Prove your answer from the scriptures.
7. What is the most important thing a local church can do to keep the purity of local church organization found in the NT?