

# **The Work Of The Church**

**Presented by:**

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# I. Introduction

## A. The Sovereignty Of Christ

### 1. Headship of the church

Jehovah God planned the church from before the beginning of time. The Holy Spirit of God instituted the church of God with power on the day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, 50 days after the Passover. Moreover, Jesus Christ the Son of God purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 2:1-43): the supreme demonstration of God's love for His creation.

*Ephesians 3:8-12* To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which **from the beginning of the ages** has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;<sup>10</sup> to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,<sup>11</sup> **according to the eternal purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,<sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

*Ephesians 5:25-27* Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her**,<sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,<sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

*Acts 20:28* Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God **which He purchased with His own blood**.

If God alone planned the church, purchased it, and instituted it, then He is its sole designer, owner, builder, and head.

*Ephesians 1:22-23* And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be **head over all things to the church**,<sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

*Ephesians 4:15, 16* ...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is **the head – Christ** –<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Therefore, only God is in the position to determine and reveal what is the purpose of His church, who are its members, how it is to function, and by whose name it is called.

### 2. Subjection of the church

As Christ is the head of the church, then the church is to be in subjection to Him. It is unreasonable for the hands and feet of the body to not do what the head tells them to do, as if they have minds of their own. To illustrate, we consider a man seriously sick and dysfunctional who has no control of his hands and feet.

*Matthew 28:18-20* And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "**All authority** has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.<sup>19</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> "teaching them to **observe all things that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

*Ephesians 5:22-24* Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.<sup>23</sup> For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, just as the **church is subject to Christ**, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

*Colossians 1:18* And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the **preeminence**.

### 3. The folly of insubordination

For us to act contrary to supreme authority of Jesus Christ is foolishness. Consider if someone today plans to establish a manufacturing company and invests his own money and effort, determining to make and sell

cupcakes. We understand that he alone has the right to decide what will be the name of his company, the recipes for his cupcakes, the qualifications required of his employees, the selling price of his products, and his hours of store operation. Intuitively, no employee has the right without the owner's consent to change anything, because it is not his company. Even if he dares to change just one thing, it is deemed insubordination and non-conformance: action worthy of employee dismissal. If one would want to change the recipes, change the product form, or change the selling price, he would need to start his own company, wherein he would have control over these things. However, in doing so, he could not legitimately claim that it is the same company as the original, regardless of what name he gives his new company.

As easy as this is to understand, these principles are completely lost in application in every other religious institution today, even though they might claim allegiance to Jehovah God. These institutions have actually changed their head; they follow the teaching of some man who is a reformer or inventor of new doctrine. They often change the institution's name to honor the originator or reflect some principle of their new doctrine. Terms of membership are changed, as well as the structure and organization of these bodies. Moreover, as will be the focus of this study, they change the mission, purpose, and function of the church. Even though they might still claim to be a part of the Lord's church, if they change just one thing, Jesus Christ is no longer the controller. It is no longer the Lord's church but man's by hostile take-over. We need to understand that God is angry with such rebellion, but this is the operating principle of denominationalism today. Looking to scripture, the rebellion of Korah and the resulting consequences are recorded as an example for our instruction.

*Numbers 16:*

<sup>3</sup> *[Korah and all his company] gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" ...*

<sup>30</sup> *[And Moses said:] "If the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD." <sup>31</sup> Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, <sup>32</sup> and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. <sup>33</sup> So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.*

The Old Testament scriptures contain many more lessons about rebellion against God.

*Leviticus 10:1-3 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace.*

*Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

#### **4. The authenticity of the church**

The nation of Israel wanted to be like the other nations around them. This sounds familiar when we see sometimes efforts in churches of Christ today to be more like the denominations around them. Being different from other churches ought to be something we embrace (Acts 17:18; 1 Peter 4:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

*1 Samuel 8:6-8 [The elders] said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us **like all the nations.**" But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. <sup>8</sup> According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day-- with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods-- so they are doing to you also."*

All other churches not in compliance are imposters and are rejected by the Lord.

*Mark 7:6-13 <sup>7</sup> And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the **commandments of men.***

*Acts 4:10-20* <sup>12</sup> *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

*Galatians 1:3-19* <sup>9</sup> *As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any **other gospel** to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*

## **B. Judgments And Traditions**

There is a difference between doctrinal matters and judgmental matters in the church. For example, consider these statements in Acts 15:

*Acts 15:19-22* *"...Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,<sup>20</sup> but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood..."<sup>22</sup> Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.*

Note that when the apostles write that we are to abstain from fornication, it is not a matter of judgment and opinion; it is an immutable matter of doctrine. We have no liberty in the matter. However, note that how the message is sent and who are the carriers are matters of judgment. They choose Judas and Silas, but they could have just as well chosen others.

There is nothing inherently wrong about human, denominational traditions in the church, as long as they are only non-binding expediencies for generic, scriptural authority. For example, the church may very well purchase a meeting house like denominations do, but it is an authorized expediency for assembling. We may have many human traditions in the church, as long as they are merely authorized expediencies and are not bound as divine law. For further examples, we may traditionally meet on Wednesday nights for Bible study or stand to sing a hymn after the assembly is exhorted to obey the gospel. These things are authorized as expediencies, as long as we recognize that they are not binding.

## **C. Authority Review**

An examination of authority in religion is an essential precursor to this study. Without understanding the interpretive rules and methods of hermeneutics and sound reasoning, a Bible student will not have the knowledge to rightly divide (literally, straightly cutting) the word of God.

*2 Timothy 2:15* *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

As this study progresses into examining the means and methods of executing the work of the church, we must particularly have a clear working knowledge of expediencies as presented in a study of authority. A detailed investigation of authority is not the intent of this study, but the following brief review is offered.

### **1. Our source of authority**

- God's word alone is our source, not the words of men (2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21).
- The silence of scripture authorizes nothing (Hebrews 7:14).
- There is a difference between what God has ordained and what man has originated (Luke 20:4).

### **2. Methods of establishing authority**

- Direct recorded commands or statements (Luke 10:26-28).
- Necessary inferences driving forced conclusions (Mark 12:26, 27).
- Approved examples (Matthew 12:5).

### **3. Recognizing specifics and generics**

- Specific terminology is limiting; it excludes and restricts. All things of a different type or kind are automatically omitted.
- Generic terminology is loosing; it includes and allows. All things of like type or kind are automatically permitted.

- There is a difference between that which is pertinent and relevant in a description and that which is coincidental and inconsequential.

#### **4. Rules of expediencies**

Expediencies are convenient, optional, and discretionary means, methods, tools, or aids for executing a generic command.

- For a thing to be expedient, it must not add, subtract, or substitute anything (1 Corinthians 4:6, 1 Samuel 15:15).
- For a thing to be expedient, it must not be specified or essential; expediencies pertain only to generics (Genesis 6:14; Exodus 12:5).
- For a thing to be expedient, it must edify or build up, never tear down (1 Corinthians 14:26).
- For a thing to be expedient, it must not offend a weak brother (1 Corinthians 8:7-13; 10:23-33).
- For a thing to be expedient, it must be lawful (1 Chronicles 13:7-10; 15:2; Matthew 23:28).

#### **5. Figurative language**

Scriptural terminology is to be interpreted literally if possible. If the language of scripture is figurative, it should be a forced conclusion on the basis of fixed rules of interpretation (2 Timothy 1:13).

- Rule of context: figurative if demanded by the immediate context.
- Rule of impossibility: figurative if the literal imposes an impossible situation.
- Rule of contradiction: figurative if the literal contradicts clear teaching in other passages.
- Rule of absurdity: figurative if the literal meaning is nonsense.
- Rule of revelation: figurative when the writer reveals that it is.

#### **6. Sound reasoning**

There are sound ways of reasoning in the scriptures, and there are perverted ways (2 Peter 2:9-20). Truthful conclusions can only follow reasoning based on both truthful premises and valid inferences. Fallacies in reasoning must be recognized in order to be avoided.

- Fallacy of authority: the words of respected men are assumed to be true.
- Fallacy of force: the words of powerful men are assumed to be true to avoid penalty.
- Fallacy of pity: a statement is assumed to be true to avoid unfavorable consequences.
- Fallacy of emotion: a statement is assumed to be true based on our feelings.
- Fallacy of ignorance: a statement is assumed true because it cannot be proven false.
- Fallacy of ambiguity: a statement is assumed true based on substitute word meanings.

### **D. Doctrinal Purity**

#### **1. Set aside self-will and preconceptions**

The Bible alone will be our guide in this study. As we begin, we must put aside all our preconceived impressions of the church. The variety church denominations around us have taken their work into many different missions and functions not revealed in scripture as divinely appointed for the church. Even in the church bearing the name of Christ alone, the unauthorized activities of human tradition sometimes creep in, which we might readily and unwittingly accept as God-ordained due our cultural familiarity with typical denominational practices. Moreover, when unauthorized practices are challenged in churches today, people will often attempt to defend them by saying nothing more than, "I don't see anything wrong with it." Authority for actions in the church ought to be based on something more than this. We should be able to produce from scripture a direct statement, approved example, or necessary inference that authorizes every activity in the church.

*Colossians 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.*

*Ephesians 4:17-19 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, <sup>18</sup> having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; <sup>19</sup> who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

## **2. Renounce the commandments of men**

We need to take an open and fresh look at scripture and renounce the contrary writings and teachings of preachers, elders, and colleges, no matter who they are (Acts 4:19; 5:29). If we cannot find in scripture the authority for the church to be involved in some function, we need to stop doing it.

*1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.*

*1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, <sup>4</sup> he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup> useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

*2 Timothy 4:1-4 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup> Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup> and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

*Titus 1:14 ...not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.*

## **3. The burden of proof**

Bear in mind that the responsibility to show the authority to perform a thing in the church rests upon those who would intend to do it. It is not the duty of others to prove that there is no authority for it.

*1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*

The question is not over what God expressly forbids but over what He expressly ordains.

Let us move forward by next looking in scripture at some grounding principles for the church.



## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Introduction

1. When did God plan the church? What was the purchase price of the church?
2. Why is the church to be in subjection to Christ?
3. When Korah and his company perished for their rebellion (Numbers 16), did the remaining congregation of the Israelites learn the lesson of submission? How many altogether perished before the matter was settled?
4. What reason did the elders of the nation of Israel give Samuel when they asked him to appoint a king over them? How does this sometimes relate to unwholesome attitudes in the Lord's church today?
5. What is our sole source of authority in the church?
6. State the three basic methods by which authority is established from scripture.
7. Explain the fundamental difference between specific and generic terminology. What is an expediency, and how does an expediency apply relative to specific and generic cases? List three rules of expediciencies and be prepared to explain them from scripture.
8. List two formal fallacies of reasoning and give examples.
9. Are all human traditions in the church unlawful? If not, explain the difference between lawful and unlawful human traditions in the church.
10. If a brother suggests a certain activity for the church and then asks what would be wrong with doing it, with is the fundamental fallacy with this process?

## II. Characteristics Of The Church

### A. The Kingdom Of Heaven

The church is described in Old Testament prophesy as the everlasting kingdom of God that would transcend all kingdoms.

*Isaiah 9:6, 7 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

*Daniel 2:44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.*

In New Testament terminology, "church" and "kingdom" indicate the same thing (Hebrews 12:23-28).

*Matthew 16:18, 19 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

The very first time the gospel is proclaimed, as recorded in Acts 2, Peter explains that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of these prophecies and declares the good news that the kingdom of God has come (vs. 29-36). He orders the people to be baptized for the remission of their sins (vs. 38), and doing so, God adds them to His church.

*Acts 2:47 ...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

#### 1. The saved

The church is the body of penitent, obedient, baptized believers. These are forgiven sinners: saved individuals (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). The prophets also foretold a suffering savior that would take sins away.

*Isaiah 53:10-12 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. <sup>11</sup> He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.*

#### 2. The called out

The English word "church," as defined by Merriam-Webster (MW), primarily means "a building for public Christian worship." According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (OED), this was the first use of the word in English, which began around 1200 AD. The word is actually derived from the Greek word for "lord:" KURIOS {koo'-ree-os}. The OED further explains that as far back as 300 AD, meeting houses were called KURIAKON, meaning, "belonging to the lord, the lord's, of the lord" (Friberg), as used of **the Lord's** Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:20.

However, the New Testament Greek word translated "church" in our English Bibles is a different word, EKKLESIA {ek-klay-see'-ah}, which comes from combining two Greek words meaning "from out of" (EK) and "to call" (KALEO {kal-eh'-o}). J. H. Thayer (JHT) describes it in a generic sense as, "1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly 1a) an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating...." It is not the gathering place but the purposed gathering itself. Incidentally, in New Testament writings, the word "KURIAKON" is never used in reference to the called out body.

The word EKKLESIA with its complete meaning is not easily translated into English by a single word. A more accurate English word is "assembly," as it is rendered in Young's Literal Translation (YLT), but it still does not relate the full connotation. Certainly, the word "church" does not represent the meaning, but this is the word the 1611 King James translators were directed to use to align with Anglican ecclesiastical doctrines and politics, as opposed to "congregation," as appears in the 1534 Tyndale New Testament (TNT) (Daniell, 2003, page 439). In fact, the TNT uses the word "church" only twice, each with reference to pagan structures, as in Acts 19:37 where it translates a compound form of HIERON {hee-er-on'}, the Greek word for "temple." Consequently, with the KJV, "church" has become the predominate word we have unfortunately inherited for EKKLESIA in our English Bibles. Therefore, we need to apply the Bible meaning to the word in our studies.

William Barclay further explains that in Athens during the classical Greek period (around 500 to 300 BC), the EKKLESIA was a duly convening assembly of legal citizens who, operating within state law, could appoint and dismiss administrative officials, direct policy, declare war, contract treaties and alliances, allocate funds, elect military leaders, and dispatch troops. Its premises were that each member had equal rights and the freedom and duty to participate. EKKLESIA also had a Hebrew sense. In the Septuagint (writings that include the Old Testament in Greek), the word translates the Hebrew word for "assembly" or "congregation," QAHAL {kaw-hawl'} (Deuteronomy 9:10), which also originates from a root meaning "to summon." Barclay further explains here the significance of the "calling out" indicated by this word. When the people of Israel assemble, it is not a happenstance gathering but a summoning by God of all the people together to listen to and act upon the word of the Lord. Clearly, this describes an ordained body with a mission and a work to accomplish.

### **3. The body of Christ**

The apostle Paul metaphorically describes the church as a body in much of his writing (Romans 12:3-16; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17; 12:11-27; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30; Colossians 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15). Some teachers today proclaim that, since the church is the body of Christ, the church has the authority to do whatever Christ did in His body during His life on earth. The problem with this reasoning is its foundation in equivocation, a fallacy of ambiguity, wherein the literal sense of the body of Christ in the flesh is traded upon the metaphorical sense of His body as a group of believers. Actually, in Paul's use of the word "body," he is figuratively explaining that the unified members are all different yet equal to each other and should be in subjection to Christ, its head, who cares for them. We need to be careful not to conclude more from this metaphor than what is intended.

According to this reasoning, carpentry should be an ordained work of the church, as this is something our Lord did in his earthly occupation (Mark 6:3). To the contrary, consider that it is completely reasonable for a man to establish an organization and define its purpose and function as something other than or more specific than everything he has ever done in his life. So it is with Christ. The church is His institution, and it is His decision to appoint what is and is not its purpose and function.

## **B. The Church Is An Organization**

In a desire to disparage orderliness in the church, some people today scoff at the idea that the church is anything more than a collection of individuals. To illustrate, this could be likened unto a group of people gathered together at a particular airport terminal gate. Moreover, if someone else happens along and joins their number, he automatically becomes part of that group. They are a group, for certain, but there is no calling out, no organization, no commonality of purpose, no conditions of acceptance, no leadership, and no established principles of operation. We ought not think of the church in this way. We will discuss this further in sections to follow, but scripture reveals that the church is much more than a mere conglomeration of people. It is indisputably an organization, an institution, a corporation, an establishment, and an association. Though these words are synonymous, their specific English meanings, given by Merriam-Webster, offer nuance into understanding church function.

### **1. Organization:**

An organization is simply a body organized with structure and purpose. The church has a head: Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22); a local body is to be structured with overseers and deacons (Philippians 1:1). Not everyone in a local body is qualified to be an overseer or deacon (1 Timothy 3:1-13). Therefore, it is more than a mere collectivity of persons.

### **2. Corporation:**

A corporation is a body legally formed to act as a single entity with various rights and duties (Ephesians 4:16). It is a functioning entity with a mission executed by members acting cooperatively. A legally formed

entity follows established governing laws (Hebrews 7:12). A mere collection of people have no duties or rights nor do they need any law or guidelines.

### 3. Establishment:

An establishment is a thing which has been established, as if by a ratified covenant. A covenant is a tangible, lawful agreement or contract which expresses reciprocal or contingent responsibilities and privileges among those accordingly bound. The church is most certainly founded upon such a basis (Hebrews 10:9).

### 4. Institution:

An institution is simply an established organization or corporation. Any institution, including the church, will be able to identify its founder (Matthew 16:16-18), its time of conception (Acts 2:33, 41), its place of origination (Luke 24:47-49), and its headquarters (Ephesians 1:20-22). A mere group of people at some random time or place can claim no such thing.

### 5. Association:

An association is a society of persons having a common interest. This sharing is typically described in scripture as "fellowship" (Ephesians 3:9, 10). From KOINONIA {koy-nohn-ee'-ah}, Thayer's definition includes, "1) ...association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse 1a) the share which one has in anything,... 1b1) the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office) 1c) a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment ...."

An association is also sometimes called a union. As the term implies, Merriam-Webster's definition includes, "Something that is made one: something formed by a combining or coalition of parts or members, as a confederation of independent individuals (as nations or persons) for some common purpose." Trade unions are an example of such an association. A union, by definition, can include either a coalition of individuals or a coalition of corporations. Scripture indicates no church organizational structure greater than the local congregation, so the church is a union, not of separate denominations, but of individuals with undivided beliefs, principles, and interests.

*1 Corinthians 1:9-13 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>10</sup> Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **all speak the same thing**, and that there be **no divisions among you**, but that you be **perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**....*

## C. The Church Is Unique

This unity and fellowship indicates that there is only one true church. In denominationalism, we see many different groups all teaching and practicing different things. Since they do not share the same beliefs, they cannot have joint participation, and they therefore exhibit not an embodiment but many different bodies. If they are different bodies, they cannot be the Lord's body. As our Lord has only one body, so He has only one church and one standard for teaching and practice. If Paul wanted to explain to us that there is only **one body**, he could not have been more clear.

*Romans 12:4, 5 For as we have many members in **one body**, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, being many, are **one body** in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

*Romans 15:5, 6 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that you may with **one mind** and **one mouth** glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*1 Corinthians 10:17 For we, though many, are one bread and **one body**; for we all partake of that one bread.*

*1 Corinthians 12:12, 13 For as the **body is one** and has many members, but all the members of that **one body**, being many, are **one body**, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into **one body** – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

*Ephesians 1:10, 23 ...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in **one** all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.... <sup>22</sup> And He put all*

things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the **church**,<sup>23</sup> **which is His body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

*Ephesians 4:4* There is **one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;<sup>5</sup> one Lord, **one faith**, one baptism.

*Colossians 3:15* And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in **one body**; and be thankful.

## D. It Is God's Wisdom Manifested

Look again at Paul's description of the church in Ephesians 3 as he explains the ministry given him by God in the gospel:

*(NAU) Ephesians 3:10* ...so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places...

Our study will show that one work of the local church is to actively and continuously preach and proclaim the wisdom of God. The original word here translated "manifold" is POLUPOIKILOS {pol-oo-poy'-kil-os}, meaning "1) much variegated, marked with a great variety of colours..." (JHT) or "many sided" (Friberg). However, the original verb translated "might be made known" (GNORIZO {gno-rid'-zo}) occurs in the aorist tense, passive voice, and subjunctive mood. The aorist indicates a simple occurrence at one point in time; the passive indicates that the subject is not producing the action but that the action is to or through another; the subjunctive indicates action that may or may not happen. Therefore, Paul is apparently not here describing the continuous duty of the local church to actively preach God's wisdom. Instead, the message in this statement is that once God establishes His church, if men will examine it, His wisdom is evident through it. As a many-sided glass prism will reflect and refract a spectrum of colors in many different directions, so the church reflects the wisdom of God from every perspective. Whether we look at the church from the viewpoint of its origin, doctrine, fellowship, value, promises, purpose, organization, or mission, we can always see God's wisdom. In similitude, "the heavens declare the glory of God" by its sheer existence, if we will but look at it (Psalm 19:1-6).

## E. Usage Of The Word "Church"

It is evident that there are at least three different connotations of the word "church" seen in the New Testament. Look at Thayer's further explanation of EKKLESIA: "...1d) in a Christian sense 1d1) an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting 1d2) a company of Christian, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs, according to regulations prescribed for the body for order's sake 1d3) those who anywhere, in a city, village, constitute such a company and are united into one body 1d4) the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth 1d5) the assembly of faithful Christians already dead and received into heaven." Let us now look at the scriptures to see these various applications revealed.

### 1. General or universal

This refers to the totality of all saved individuals for all times in all places. This is the one church, one body, which Jesus established (1 Corinthians 10:32; Philippians 3:6).

*Matthew 16:18* And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

*Hebrews 12:22, 23* But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Remarkably, scripture indicates no organizational structure of the church in the universal sense, other than Christ as its head and Christians as its members (Ephesians 5:23, 30). There are no earthly headquarters and no ordained governing officials over the church universally. Denominationalism has perverted this divine arrangement by introducing earthly headquarters, fragmented bodies, and intermediate layers of government.

Scripture also indicates no active mission or function ordained for the church as a body universally. As considered previously, the church declares the wisdom of God by its mere existence. We will later examine

the work of individual Christians as members of the universal church, but this is not the church universal functioning as a corporate body.

A person is added to the church in a general sense the moment he becomes a Christian. This occurs not by the power of man but of God alone (Acts 2:47). Since it is God who adds a Christian to the church universally, no Christian has the power to demand of God that he be removed from it. The relationship is likened to a marriage, which God intends to be a permanent bond (2 Corinthians 11:2; Romans 7:1-4; Ephesians 5:23-33; James 4:4).

## 2. Specific or local

This refers to local churches in various places; the members of each have agreed to band together to work and worship in a cooperative way according to divinely prescribed ordinances. This is the only case in which the New Testament writers speak of churches in the plural.

*1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the **churches** of the saints.*

*Revelation 1:11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven **churches** which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."*

Though God alone established the church in the general sense, local churches are started by men in accordance with a divinely revealed pattern. Scripture describes how the very first gospel preachers went from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, just as the Lord had instructed (Acts 1:8; 8:1, 5, 40). As believers obeyed, they started churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:22, 31). These preachers eventually took the gospel to the whole world (Acts 13:2-5, 14, 49; 14:21), setting up more churches everywhere, exhorting each one and appointing elders in every church (Acts 14:21-23). Thus, they established local churches here and there. New local churches are started today by following this same pattern. The gospel is like seed. If you sow pumpkin seeds, you will produce pumpkins. If you sow the word of God, you will produce local churches (Matthew 13:3-23; 1 Peter 1:23). Encyclopedias state that the church of Christ originates in the reformation efforts of Barton W. Stone and Alexander Campbell (circa 1800), but this is untrue. These men were calling for a return to scripture for religious authority.

Bear in mind that although a man may start a new local church, it is not the church of that man; it is still the church of Christ. To illustrate, suppose a man named Smith invents a new machine. He first imagines it, then draws the complete fabrication plans, writes detailed specifications, builds it, and calls it a Smith-machine. Now suppose Mr. Smith reveals these plans and specifications to Mr. Jones, who likewise builds one, perfectly following the original plans and specifications. In doing so, he has built nothing more or less than another Smith-machine. Smith is still the one who invented it, designed it, and originated it. However, if Jones decides not to follow the original plans but augments, diminishes, or otherwise alters the plans, it is no longer a genuine Smith-machine but something else. Now if he calls it also a Smith-machine, it is actually a fraud. This follows natural rules of logical reasoning.

Now apply this reasoning to a local church. All local churches following the same God-ordained scriptural pattern will teach the same doctrine, worship in the same modes, wear the same name, and work toward the same purposes. Although there are many different local churches throughout the world, they are not different **kinds** of churches; they are all churches of Christ, which can be identified by their common features, just as they were in the first century. As discussed earlier, this is fellowship: a sharing in beliefs, principles, and practices. However, if a local church stops teaching and practicing things according to the original, divine pattern, it ceases to be the church of Christ, even if they call themselves the church of Christ. This is the essence of denominationalism: different kinds of churches teaching and practicing different things. The Lord had exhorted Moses to build the tabernacle entirely according to the pattern he had been given. We ought to do the same with His church.

*Hebrews 8:5 ...who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."*

Note again that a local church is more than a mere collection of area members. Just because a number of Christians live in Smithsburg does not mean the church of Smithsburg automatically exists and that they are coincidentally part of it. A local church is a structured organization with a corporate mission.

A Christian becomes a member of a specific or local church when he joins himself to it and is accepted among them (Acts 9:26-28). As a Christian can join himself to a local body, he can also remove himself from a local body to join another, as Apollos did, moving from Ephesus to Corinth (Acts 18:27). Moreover, a Christian can be removed from among a local body due to his unfaithfulness after repeated warnings (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 7, 13). A clear indication of the association or affiliation of Christians with different local bodies is evident in scripture. Phoebe was said to belong to the local body at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Aquila and Priscilla were members at Ephesus, where the church would meet in their home (Acts 18:18, 19; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

It is a misconception to think of the general church as simply a collection of all local churches. Scripture reveals no corporate sub-structure higher than the single, autonomous local body. It is also incorrect to think of the local church as nothing more than a group of Christians who assemble together several times a week for worship. We have already noted that the corporate body has a mission, function, structure, and organization beyond merely Christians randomly assembling for worship.

### 3. Assembled

The New Testament speaks of the church in yet another special way: when a local body assembles together for divinely appointed activities.

*Acts 14:27 Now when they had come and **gathered the church together**, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*

*1 Corinthians 11:18 For first of all, when you **come together as a church**, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.*

*1 Corinthians 14:23-28 Therefore if the **whole church comes together in one place**, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. <sup>25</sup> And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent **in church**, and let him speak to himself and to God.*

In Acts 14:27 "gathered...together" translates a single word, SUNAGO {soon-ag'-o} (from whence, "synagogue"), meaning, "1) to gather together... 2) assemble..." (JHT). The shortfall of translating EKKLESIA as "assembly" becomes apparent here; doing so might yield, "they assembled the assembly." Evidently, EKKLESIA and SUNAGO indicate different collectives. The church is a purposed group of individuals (EKKLESIA) whether or not they are assembled together in one place (SUNAGO).

A keynote to consider in this matter is the reason or purpose for the gathering. Remember that the church is the EKKLESIA of God: a calling out of people from their own places into one place to execute the purposes of the one by whom they are summoned. Though this has significance with respect to the church in the universal sense, there is a particular implication relating to the gathered local sense. If the gathering is not for the purposes of the Lord's summoning, it is not the Lord's gathering. At the risk of getting ahead of our study, we will see in scripture that church gatherings have a spiritual emphasis. If the reason that brings the people together today is purely secular, whether it is for social, recreational, or entertainment purposes, it is not the church as such in the assembled sense.

As a point of clarification, consider the state of the local church after it is no longer assembled together. For example, most of the people in any church assembly are identified with that local body, just as Paul "joined himself" to the local church at Jerusalem (Acts 9:26). However, after the gathering is dismissed and each one is separated to their homes, that church no longer exists in its assembled condition until they assemble again. Nevertheless, the church in the local or specific sense does not cease to exist. Otherwise, the elders and deacons would no longer hold their positions. Instead, they are all still members of that local body. Even though they are no longer assembled together in one place, they may very well still be conducting divinely ordained cooperative activity under the elder's supervision.

We will examine these things in greater detail when we later discuss the distinction between the individual Christian and the local church as a corporate body.

## F. Church Autonomy

Scripture indicates that each local church is a stand-alone entity. No church is ever seen as a smaller part of a larger group or as an agent of another church. One church is never in a position of authority over another nor is it ever in subjection to another. Otherwise, there could not be equality among those churches (2 Corinthians 8:14). The word "autonomous" does not appear in scripture, but it accurately describes the independent nature of each local body as revealed in scripture. Let's examine attributes of the church that expound upon this concept.

### 1. Self-managing

The New Testament scriptures reveal no level of church government greater than the local church. Elders, that is, overseers or pastors, are appointed within the churches of whom they are among. Those leaders have the supervision only over their own local church, none others.

*Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

Paul here makes clear that the elders are to be among the flock they are supervising. "Flock" and "church" are singular in this passage. Scripture says nothing about elders ruling multiple churches of whom they are not among.

*1 Peter 5:1-3 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;*

*Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

Elders are appointed to have rule over the church they are among, but their rule is executive, not legislative. It is not the place of elders to issue law but to carry out the Law of Christ. Elders rule in matters of judgment and expediency in the church, but even then, not as domineering overlords. In matters of doctrine, the church is subject to Christ alone (Acts 5:29; Ephesians 5:23, 24). If an elder becomes disorderly, Paul gives instruction for the local church to admonish him openly.

*1 Timothy 5:17-20 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." <sup>19</sup> Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.*

The jurisdiction of elders is limited to their own local body. Churches are never to be in subjection to the elders of some other church, but each church is to have its own elders to oversee its own work (Acts 14:23). Moreover, elders rule over matters pertaining to the church as a body, not in the personal lives of individual Christians (Ephesians 4:11, 12). We will closely examine the distinction between the church and the individual in the next section.

### 2. Self-ministering

Churches also appoint their own deacons, or servants, from among their own members to care for their own needs (Philippians 1:1).

*Acts 6:2-4 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; <sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

It is debatable whether the men appointed in Acts 6 are deacons in the official sense (1 Timothy 3:8-13) or simply men appointed to a task or as servants in a generic way, as were both men and women at times in the churches (Romans 16:1; Colossians 1:7). Either way, our conclusion concerning autonomy is the same.



### 3. Self-monitoring

Churches decide on their own whom they accept among them and who they refuse to accept. They are instructed to do so on the basis of what they know regarding another's faithfulness and moral worthiness, not on orders from another church. If a church knows a brother to be faithful according to the law of God, no other church has the jurisdiction to demand they refuse him fellowship. Likewise, if a church knows a brother to be unfaithful, no other church has the jurisdiction to demand they fellowship him. They might advise or warn them of a brother's character (Romans 16:2, 17), but each church is to investigate on their own and reach their own conclusions (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

*Acts 9:26-28 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.*

*1 Corinthians 5:1-5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles -- that a man has his father's wife! <sup>2</sup> And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. <sup>3</sup> For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. <sup>4</sup> In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>5</sup> deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus....*

*1 Corinthians 5:11-13 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner -- not even to eat with such a person. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? <sup>13</sup> But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."*

### 4. Self-delegating

Churches choose preachers on their own and appoint them on missions of evangelizing. Each church selected on their own those who were assigned certain tasks.

*Acts 11:22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.*

*1 Corinthians 16:3, 4 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.*

*2 Corinthians 8:18-19 And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, <sup>19</sup> and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind.*

Scripture reveals no such thing as a regional council, international synod, or a head church that designates pastors, evangelists, teachers, or ministers in other churches.

### 5. Self-financing

Churches collect their own funds and keep their own treasuries to finance and manage their own work (2 Corinthians 8:8-12).

*1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup> On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*

Scripture does not reveal that churches ever sponsor other churches or control another church's expenditures.

## 6. Self-motivating

A local body has its own responsibility for exhortation and admonition within itself to empower each member of the body to work together to perform its ordained mission (Romans 12:4-8; Hebrews 10:24, 25).

*Ephesians 4:16 ...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:12-14 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,<sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.<sup>14</sup> Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*

Scripture nowhere authorizes that an outside leading coalition ought ever be formed to develop national programs or out-reach campaigns that are imposed upon the local churches.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Characteristics Of The Church

1. What is the difference between the church of Christ and the kingdom of heaven?
2. What is the original Greek word translated "church" in our English Bibles? Explain in your own words what this word means. Be specific and include details.
3. Would you say that the church is an organization? Explain your answer.
4. What do the concepts of unity and fellowship reveal about the nature of the church of Christ?
5. In Ephesians 3:10, Paul explains that the church declares the "manifold wisdom of God." What is the meaning of "manifold wisdom?" In this context, how does the church do this?
6. What are the three different uses of the word "church" we see in the New Testament?
7. How can we identify what kind of church a church is?
8. Is a local church more than just a collection of Christians that meet together regularly? If so, what more is it?
9. What is the significant connection between the purpose of a summoning and the function of the people thereby gathered?
10. Explain local church autonomy in your own words. What is the scope and limitation of the elders of a local church?

### III. The Individual And The Church

The points to follow will become pivotal as we progress further into our study. These basic principles must be understood fully, as they will become the logical foundation of many conclusions.

#### A. Distinction Between An Individual And The Collective Body

We intuitively understand the difference between individual action and collective action on a secular, everyday basis. Let's return to the illustration of making cupcakes. If someone makes and sells cupcakes and their next door neighbor does the same thing, the action is coincidental, not cooperative. Nothing that one does affects the other. However, if they decide to pool their resources, share their recipes, and distribute duties between them, this becomes something clearly different. To work together, they will need to establish some rules and guidelines, or else confusion and conflict will result. Likewise, the same is true for individual and collective action among Christians regarding spiritual things.

Note that authority given to Christians as individuals does not necessarily apply to the church as a collective body. Though some may scoff at the idea of such a distinction, the Bible clearly indicates a difference between action of the corporate body and that of individual Christians. For instance, this distinction is evident in the instructions concerning the care of needy widows:

*1 Timothy 5:16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and **do not let the church be burdened**, that it may relieve those who are really widows.*

#### B. Collective Action As A Church And Not As A Church

As briefly mentioned previously, a distinction must be noted for gatherings and group functions not for divinely appointed activities. To illustrate, when all the members of a local body assemble together for some purpose other than what scripture reveals is the work of the church, it is not a church assembly in a spiritual sense, and it is not collectively church action, even though the assembly might be made up of exactly the same group of people. The local body still exists along with the elders and deacons who might be appointed, but the secular gathering is coincidentally not a coming together "as a church."

*1 Corinthians 11:18 For, in the first place, when you **come together as a church**, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it.*

Note that Paul would not have made such a distinction unless it were possible for them to come together **not** as a church. For example, our study will eventually show that baseball is not a work of the church. Therefore, if all the members of a local church go to a baseball game together, it is not a church function; it is not a "church outing."

The same is true if just several of the members of a local church work together on a certain project. For example, if some of the members decide to work together on clearing hiking trails in a local municipal park, this does not become the work of the church. For a scriptural example, consider Paul working together with Aquila and Priscilla making tents (Acts 18:3). Here is cooperative action of Christians, but it is not activity of the church. Tentmaking has nothing to do with the work of the church.

In addition, even when several Christians act jointly for spiritual purposes, it is also not necessarily the church functioning as a body. For example, an individual may personally invite a small group into his home to sing hymns, for prayer, or for Bible study (Acts 10:3-8). This is not corporate church action, and the elders would have no right to make any judgmental ruling over those activities.

As this study continues, we will observe in scripture whether actions involve individuals or the church as a corporate body. It is actually not difficult to see the distinction. However, keep in mind that not every case where a group of Christians act together is it necessarily the church as a body acting corporately.

#### C. Duties Of Individual Christians

Being a Christian is more than being a part of the collective body or assembling for worship; it is a way of life 24 hours a day. It governs every aspect and relationship in life.

*1 Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; <sup>14</sup> as obedient children, not*

conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; <sup>15</sup> but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

## 1. Areas of responsibility

Here are some areas of instruction from the scriptures that govern our lives as individuals:

- The Community (Social Relationships): 1 Peter 2:12, Colossians 4:5
- Business (Economic Relationships): Colossians 3:22-4:1, Ephesians 6:5-9
- The Home (Family Relationships): Ephesians 5:22-6:4
- Government (Civil Relationships): Romans 13:1-8
- The Church in General (Spiritual Relationships): Hebrews 12:28; 2 Peter 3:11

Some duties of the individual Christian are not authorized to be performed by the collective church. While it is the duty of the church to teach that Christian individuals are to do these things, the scriptures nowhere indicate that it is the church's duty to perform them as a corporate body. The following are some duties of individual Christians, exclusively:

- Make a living: 1 Timothy 5:8, 16. The church is not an economic business institution.
- Raise your children: Ephesians 6:4. The church is not a day-care center.
- Love your spouse: Ephesians 5:25. The church is not a family crisis clinic.
- Serve your country: 1 Peter 2:13. The church has no political agenda.
- Serve your fellow man: Galatians 6:6-10. The church is not a general benevolent society.
- Visit orphans: James 1:27. The church is not an orphanage.
- Show hospitality: 1 Peter 4:9, 10. The church is not a social club.

In every scripture listed above, the context clearly indicates that the instructions are addressed to individuals specifically, not to the church as a corporate body:

*1 Timothy 5:8, 16 But if **anyone** does not provide for **his** own,... If any believing **man** or **woman** has widows, let them relieve them,...*

*Ephesians 6:4 And you, **fathers**, do not provoke **your** children to wrath,*

*Ephesians 5:25, 29 **Husbands**, love **your** wives,... For **no one** ever hated **his own** flesh,*

*1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit **yourselves** to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,..*

*Galatians 6:1-10 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. 2 Bear **one another's** burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if **anyone** thinks **himself** to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives **himself**. 4 But let **each one** examine his **own** work, and then he will have rejoicing in **himself alone**, and not in another. 5 For **each one** shall bear his **own** load. 6 Let **him** who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever **a man** sows, that **he** will also reap. 8 For **he** who sows to **his** flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but **he** who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

*James 1:23-27 For if **anyone** is a hearer of the word and not a doer, **he** is like **a man** observing **his** natural face in a mirror.... But **he** who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it... will be blessed in what **he** does. If **anyone** among you thinks **he** is religious, and does not bridle **his** tongue..., **this one's** religion is useless. 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.*

*1 Peter 4:9, 10 Be hospitable to **one another** without grumbling. As **each one** has received a gift, minister it to **one another**....*

## 2. Sound reasoning

False teachers will scoff at such reasoning and claim that it is irrational to be so particular about pronouns. Notwithstanding, a study of hermeneutics will show that our Lord and the apostles make similar interpretive discernments based upon the singular number (Galatians 3:16), subjunctive mood (John 21:23), and present tense (Luke 20:37, 38). It is likewise reasonable to make distinctions in scripture on the basis of any other linguistic inflectional form, whether of case or gender, as may be applicable.

*Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.*

*2 Peter 3:16 ...as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*

Some preachers claim that everything the apostle Paul teaches in the epistles that he addresses directly to churches (Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians) is applicable for the function of the church as a collective body. For example, according to this reasoning, when Paul writes in Galatians 6:10 "let us do good to all," the word "us" supposedly corresponds to "the churches" mentioned in 1:2. This reasoning is faulty. Sound hermeneutics requires that we look at the immediate context. Following back in reverse, the matching antecedent is found in 5:24: "Those who are Christ's," who manifest the fruits of the Spirit. This is not a reference to the corporate body but each member, individually. To expound, it is unreasonable to consider a group as having **self**-control (5:23), except in that each individual demonstrates it on his own. The context further indicates individual application consistently, as noted earlier. Moreover, if Paul is here stating that the corporate church has the responsibility to aid all in need, he contradicts himself when he instructs Timothy concerning certain widows to "not let the church be burdened" (1 Timothy 5:16). As a preacher today can admonish a collective church to live righteously as individuals, so can Paul in his epistles (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6).

The church is not a domestic relations organization. Parenting education, sociology, psychology, finance management, and other such subjects to the extent not taught in the scriptures are not the teaching of the church. Preachers who specialize, for example, in marriage counseling and would teach more than what the Bible teaches should not think they are doing the work of a gospel preacher.

*1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...*

We will discuss this further when we examine in detail things that are **not** the work of the church.

### D. Duties Of The Collective Body

Some duties are restricted only to corporate action. These actions are carried out only when the church functions as a collective body, as when assembled:

- The Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:20-29
- Contributing to the church treasury: 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2

There is a point of confusion that needs to be avoided. In anything that people do as corporate activity, the individual element still remains. For example, when we take the Lord's Supper, we do it in our assembly as a group (Acts 20:7) and we wait for each other (1 Corinthians 11:33). However, each one individually eats and drinks and examines his own self (1 Corinthians 11:28). Similarly, we all individually give, but the collection is corporate action. Likewise, when we sing and pray as a group, each one of us individually also sings and prays. The fact that the individual action persists in this does not negate the fact that it is distinctively corporate action (Ephesians 4:16).

**Valid premise:** Whatever the church does as a collective entity, it is the individuals that are doing it.

However, some teachers invert this and proclaim that any individual action is therefore church action. The following premise results:

**False premise:** Whatever a Christian individual can do, the church as a collective body can do and vice versa.

This is illogical. According to this reasoning, since praying together is church action, then an individual praying privately at home is also church action. An individual making cupcakes would therefore also be church action. Not so. The fallacy resides in neglecting that not all paired statements can be legitimately

inverted – only those that are mutually dependent. For example, whenever you make omelets you have to break eggs, but if you are breaking eggs, you are not necessarily making omelets. Remember: if a man is caring for his elderly, needy, widowed mother, Paul indicates that it is **not** the church as such doing it (1 Timothy 5:16).

Those who cannot find scriptural authority for some corporate church action they are desiring to undertake will scoff at this in an attempt to deceive the unsuspecting. Nevertheless, the soundness and logic of the reasoning presented here are valid.

## E. Duties Shared By The Body Collectively And Individually

Some duties are assigned to the body as collective action and also to the individual as well:

	<b>Collectively</b>	<b>Individually</b>
Withdrawal from unruly:	1 Corinthians 5:4, 5	2 Thessalonians 3:14
Teaching the gospel:	1 Thessalonians 1:8	2 Timothy 2:2
Supporting gospel preachers:	Philippians 4:15-18; 2 Corinthians 11:8	2 Corinthians 11:9; Galatians 6:6-10
Benevolence of needy Christians:	1 Timothy 5:16	1 John 3:17

Conclusively, the Holy Spirit has set boundaries on the work that has been appointed to the church as a corporate body compared to that of the individual Christian. Someone may argue that it makes no difference what the church as a body does compared to what individual Christians do. However, like Nadab and Abihu, acting without authority is rebellion before God, regardless how small we think a thing to be (Leviticus 10:1-3). This deserves careful consideration.

## F. The Work Of The Collective Church

As we begin to study the work of the church in detail, please keep in mind that our intent is not to investigate the work of a Christian individual but to examine in particular what the Bible reveals to be the work and mission that God has ordained for the church as a collective, corporate, organized body.

Unfortunately, there doesn't appear to be any one passage in scripture that succinctly indicates by a direct proclamation or command that the work of the church is entirely thus and so. Therefore, to determine what God has ordained to be the work of the church, we must gather the pertinent statements and observe corporate church action in approved examples, drawing the necessary inferences from scripture. In the book of Acts, we get a good historical view of what the early church was doing as a collective body. An appropriate place to begin our observations is where the church is first established on the day of Pentecost.

*Acts 2:38-47 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." <sup>41</sup> Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. <sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup> and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. <sup>46</sup> So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

Looking at this one passage, we begin to see what the remainder of our study will show. The work of the church can be accommodatively presented in three categories:

### 1. Teaching the gospel

*...And with many other words he testified and exhorted them...*

*...those who gladly received his word were baptized...*

*...And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship...*

## **2. Worship**

*...in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...*

*...So continuing daily with one accord in the temple...*

## **3. Benevolence of needy saints**

*...Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need...*

Our observations will indicate some practical overlapping of these categories, so we ought not consider these as mutually exclusive activities but only as an expediency for discussion. We will next consider each of these in greater detail.



## Questions And Thoughts For Review: The Individual And The Church

1. Is it reasonable to make a distinction between individual and corporate action?
2. In every case where people are working toward the same goal, it is cooperative action?
3. What must be in place for cooperative action to occur?
4. Does God authorize individual Christians to do some things He does not authorize the church as a body to do?
5. Name several activities that God ordains for individual Christians that are not ordained for the church as a body.
6. Name several activities that God ordains for the church as a body that are not ordained for individual Christians.
7. Name several activities that God ordains for both the church as a body and individual Christians.
8. If any man preaches in accordance to God's will, what should be the source of his message?
9. When people act cooperatively, does individual action cease?
10. What three categories of corporate church activity are revealed in Acts 2:38-47?

## IV. A Work Of The Church: Teaching The Gospel

### A. Evangelizing

God divinely appointed the church to be the organization through which Christians work cooperatively to spread the gospel. Perhaps the scripture that most concisely reveals this function of the local church is among Paul's words to Timothy:

*1 Timothy 3:15 But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

The word "pillar" is translated from STULOS {stoo'-los}, which Thayer defines as "1) a pillar 2) a column... 3) a prop or support." Thayer further explains that the word is derived from STUO, to stiffen, which is properly akin to the base of the prolonged verb form HISTEMI {his'-tay-mee} meaning "1) to cause or make to stand, to place, put, set... 1b) to make firm, fix, establish 1b1) to cause a... thing to keep... its place 1b2) to stand, be kept intact... 1b3) to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything... 2a1a) of the foundation of a building..." (JHT). The word "ground" is from HEDRAIOMA {hed-rah'-yo-mah} similarly meaning "a stay, prop, support" (JHT). God has commissioned the church to hold forth the truth of the gospel to the world and to maintain the authority of God's word.

Correspondingly, in the book of Acts, we see that the church in Antioch sends Saul and Barnabas on a preaching trip, taking the gospel to those who had never heard. They are sent again by the church to Jerusalem to teach regarding a false doctrine among the church there. Paul commends the church at Thessalonica for their efforts in teaching the gospel, both near and in far-reaching places.

*Acts 13:1-5 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers....<sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."<sup>3</sup> Then,... they sent them away....<sup>5</sup> And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews...*

*Act 15:1-3 ...<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.<sup>3</sup> So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria...*

*1 Thessalonians 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.*

The days of the apostles and prophets have passed (1 Corinthians 13:8-13), but for instruction in the word, the Lord has given us evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the churches today.

*Ephesians 4:11-12 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

For example, Titus labored among the churches of Crete, setting all things in order and appointing elders as directed by the word of the Lord through Paul.

*Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you --*

*1 Thessalonians 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.*

*Hebrews 10:25 ...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.*

Admonishing and exhorting are synonyms for teaching.

## B. Edification And Evangelism

Gospel preachers have traditionally identified edification as a work of the church separate from evangelism. This nomenclature was pronounced around the middle of the last century when gospel preachers were speaking out against churches cooperating with human institutions and engaging in social and recreational activities. However, they defined "evangelism" as preaching the gospel to non-Christians and "edification" as building up Christians by instruction in the word. Though these explanations rightly express the work of the church, a fundamental misuse of terms resides herein.

To explain, the English verb "evangelize" is defined simply as "to preach the gospel to" (MW). This comes directly from the Greek EUAGGELIZO {yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo}, a combination of EU {yoo} (good) and AGGELOS {ang'-el-os} (a messenger, from whence, "angel"). EUAGGELIZO means "1) to bring good news, to announce glad tidings 1a) used in the [Old Testament] of any kind of good news..." (JHT). It indicates the proclaiming of any good tidings (Luke 1:19) regardless of the faithfulness of the hearer (1 Corinthians 15:1, 2).

Curiously, none of the New Testament writers use the Greek noun form equivalent to "evangelism," which in English means "1: the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ" (MW). Herein lays the source of the word misuse. The English noun "evangelism" speaks directly to the desired effect of making believers out of unbelievers. Though one brings about the other in this case, "bringing good news" does not actually mean "making converts." In contrast, the New Testament Greek noun forms speak not to the reaction of the hearers but rather to the cause: the message and the messenger. Specifically, EUAGGELION {yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on} (often translated "gospel") means "good tidings" (Matthew 4:23), and EUAGGELISTES {yoo-ang-ghel-is-tace'} means "a bringer of good tidings" (JHT) (2 Timothy 4:5). So while the earlier preachers use the noun "evangelism" true to its English slant toward winning the unfaithful, it is a diversion from its true Greek origin: "good news bringing."

To explain further, "edification" translates OIKODOME {oy-kod-om-ay'}, which means literally, "(the act of) building, building" (JHT). When used metaphorically, as is the case in reference to churches and Christians (Ephesians 4:12), it means "promoting the spiritual growth and development of character of believers, by teaching or by example" (W E Vine). The word is used repeatedly in Romans 14:19 - 15:2 of a brother building up a weaker brother by refraining to eat certain meats and thus avoiding actions that lead a brother into sin. Conclusively, the original word does not indicate a building up by word alone but also by our kind and considerate deeds.

Some preachers have suggested that OIKODOME in Ephesians 4:12 indicates evangelism, that is, making converts in order to increase membership numbers, like adding bricks to a building under construction (Matthew 26:61). This is a misapplication of the term. The metaphorical use of OIKODOME is not about literally building but an up-building: encouraging, supporting, and uplifting. We ought to be careful not to alter the meaning of words. It is the seed of false doctrine.

We will note some potential pitfalls of calling evangelism "the making of converts" and of considering edification a categorical work of the church, when we later discuss things which are not works of the church. Let's now observe in scripture how edification is accomplished among individuals and within the church as a corporate body.

### 1. Edification within the church

Accepting that edification is broadly an upbuilding and encouraging by any and every means or methods of words or deeds, we must observe carefully that the scripture has not yet been found that actually states the work of the church is edification, generically. Remarkably, in every case recorded in scripture where corporate church action results in edification, teaching the gospel is the specific cause. Consider some examples:

*Ephesians 4:11, 12 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some **evangelists**, and some pastors and **teachers, for the equipping of the saints** for the work of ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ.***

*Ephesians 4:15, 16 But, **speaking the truth in love**, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ -- <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, **causes growth of the body for the edifying** of itself in love.*

*1 Corinthians 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**.*

Regarding the work of the church as a body, the statement "Let all things be done for edification" does not mean "Let all edifying things be done." Paul is not ordering any particular actions, but his point is that, whatever the church is doing, it ought to build up, not tear down.

## **2. Edification among individual Christians**

Equally remarkable, in every case that the scriptures do command us to edify others in the broad sense, the instruction is to individual Christians exclusively, not the corporate church.

*Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which **one may edify another**.*

*Romans 15:2 Let **each** of us please **his** neighbor for **his** good, **leading to edification**.*

*1 Corinthians 10:23 All things are lawful **for me**, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful **for me**, but not all things **edify**.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore comfort **each** other and **edify one another**, just as you also are doing.*

Therefore, individual Christians have the authority to edify or encourage others by sending fruit baskets to newcomers, birthday or anniversary cards to those celebrating, or flowers to those grieving, but these activities are not the work of the church as a body.

In the final analysis, the work of the church is teaching the gospel, specifically, whether to Christians or non-Christians, which coincidentally results in edification in every case. If a preacher is preaching the gospel to an assembly of both Christians and non-Christians, it is unreasonable to consider that the same action is "edification" to the Christians but "evangelism" to the non-Christians. When properly understood, the distinction is unnecessary.

## **C. Baptizing**

The making of disciples is described in scripture with a different word: MATHETEUSO {math-ayt-yoo'-o}, "to make a disciple" (JHT). A disciple is not only a learner or pupil but an obedient follower (John 8:31). Jesus explains how to make disciples: teach men and baptize them:

*Matthew 28:19, 20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

Hearing is with the ears, belief is with the heart, repentance is with the mind, confession is with the mouth (Romans 10:9-17), but baptism requires water.

*Acts 8:35-37 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.<sup>36</sup> Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" ...<sup>38</sup> So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.*

Consider that when an individual submits himself to baptism, his participation is passive, meaning that he receives the action. However, for the one baptizing, his participation is active, meaning that he performs the action. The scriptures consistently indicate this active and passive cooperation in baptism, as noted in the following text:

*John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing [active voice] in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized [passive voice].*

The questions of whether an individual can legitimately baptize himself or whether the legitimacy of his baptism depends upon the faithfulness of the baptizer is to be discussed in a separate study. For our present purposes, we only note that baptism is fundamentally a shared experience. Baptism is not merely individual action; others also have joint participation in this. The work of the church is to teach individuals that they

need to be baptized, and the work of the church as a body is also to baptize them. We will further examine baptism when later discussing worship as a work of the church.

## D. Church-supported Gospel Preachers

Scripture indicates that men who devote their time to preaching the gospel deserve to be paid for their time by the church.

*1 Timothy 5:17, 18 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."*

In 1 Corinthians 9:3-14, Paul goes into great detail to explain that it is the Lord's will that evangelists might be adequately compensated monetarily for their labor by the churches. He conclusively states:

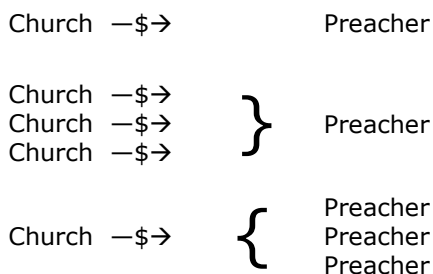
*1 Corinthians 9:14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

The scriptures show examples of churches in the first century cooperating with evangelists to provide their financial support. This is another way that a local church as a corporate body can participate in gospel preaching.

*Philippians 1:3-6 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, <sup>5</sup> for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

*Philippians 4:10-18 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: <sup>12</sup> I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. <sup>18</sup> Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.*

However, we learn about churches supporting preachers only through approved examples; we have no direct recorded generic commands concerning this. In the recorded examples, the only method in use is that funds from one church are sent directly to the evangelist as his wages. As these examples are uniform, we are forced to conclude that the authority must have been specific and follow the pattern to the same degree. Scriptural funding for gospel preachers can therefore be illustrated by this simple diagram:



As it is lawful for one church to send funds to one preacher, then it is also lawful for multiple churches to independently send contributions to one preacher or for one church to send to multiple preachers. In every case, there is effectively no other action than a church sending funds directly to a preacher.

*2 Corinthians 11:7- 9 Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? <sup>8</sup> I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. <sup>9</sup> And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. <sup>10</sup> As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall*

*stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. <sup>11</sup> Why? Because I do not love you? God knows! <sup>12</sup> But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.*

When Paul says "I robbed other churches," we are forced conclude his language is figurative, as it is certainly not God's will that Paul be a thief. Instead, using hyperbole and irony, Paul explains that though he could have accepted financial support from the church at Corinth, he chose not to in order to not be a burden to them. It seems reasonable that the church among whom an evangelist labors would be the body financially supporting him. However, since this was not the case when he was at Corinth, Paul describes it as robbery for the churches in Macedonia to send support to him instead of to other preachers, all while Corinth was capable of supporting him. Nevertheless, Paul does this as a demonstration of integrity and in order to help prevent some from becoming jealous of him in the matter.

*2 Corinthians 12:13-16 For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong! <sup>14</sup> Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. <sup>15</sup> And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. <sup>16</sup> But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!*

*1 Corinthians 9:9-11 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? <sup>10</sup> Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. <sup>11</sup> If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*

*2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, <sup>9</sup> not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*

Each church has the authority to financially support gospel preachers. However, note that funds delivered to a preacher are called "wages" in scripture: the compensation for his time. It is thus his money when he receives it, and he can use this money for anything he wishes. He can use this money for groceries or to buy a boat, the same as those who receive wages in secular occupations. Conclusively, it is unscriptural for a church to send money to a preacher "earmarked" for a specific purpose. They cannot mandate that he use the money only to buy teaching aids, printed material, or the like. Moreover, a church has no scriptural authority to send money to another church to help them pay for their supplies, teaching materials, utility bills, or any other such thing. Support in the form of wages alone only goes to the preacher. This is the only New Testament pattern.

The point to all this is that every church has the responsibility to be doing all it can with the resources available to preach the gospel locally and support men in other places who do the same.

## **1. Missionary societies**

It is crucial to note that New Testament churches never funneled their contributions to Paul through a man-made missionary society that managed the work for them. Instead, each church sent their contributions to Paul directly. This way, as each church knew the character of Paul, then each church knew that their money was going to support a sound preacher. If the money had been channeled through a secondary distribution entity or a missionary society, this verification would be lost; the responsibility God gave the church to manage its own work would be surrendered to others for them to manage. Then, if the funds end up in the hands of a heretic preacher, those churches unwittingly become partakers in his false teaching. Any church involved in such comes under the Lord's condemnation. Their ignorance is no excuse, because they have violated the divine pattern in the first place.

When man forms missionary societies and human organizations to pay preachers, he supplants the divinely instituted organization for this task: the church. We are effectively telling God, "Your church is okay, but we think there are better ways of getting the job done." Remember, God's ways and God's thoughts are higher than man's (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Man forms an unscriptural arrangement when he inserts another organization or institution into the process. Such arrangements as shown in the diagram to follow are unauthorized:

Church            —\$→    Missionary Society    —\$→    Preacher

Many Churches —\$→ Missionary Society —\$→ Many Preachers

## 2. Sponsoring church arrangements

Even if the inserted organization is another church, there is no authority for it. It is simply a church functioning as missionary society. Scripture nowhere supports the practice of one church sending money to another church for them to send to a preacher. We might call this a "sponsoring church" arrangement, and it is unscriptural:

Church —\$→ Sponsoring Church —\$→ Preacher

Whereas a number of small churches might not have much to contribute each on their own, human reasoning would suggest that if many small churches funnel their money through a single large church, more support can be accomplished with greater efficiency.

Many Smaller Churches —\$→ Large Sponsoring Church —\$→ Many Preachers

Although this might seem expedient from a human reasoning perspective, it is not a mere matter of expediency. This is because the pattern of direct church-to-preacher support is uniform in all recorded examples. Therefore, the authority is specific, and we do not have the liberty execute it differently. Remember that for a thing to be an expediency, it cannot be specified; expediencies apply to generic commands only. If a command is specific, our only choice is to do it in obedience or not do it in rebellion. Moreover, this arrangement changes things. This unlawfully creates an additional management level, breaks down church autonomy, and also relieves the small churches of their responsibility to manage their own work. Mere expediencies do not add, subtract, or otherwise change anything.

This arrangement is not a better idea than God's simple plan. We may think the matter is insignificant, but it is still action without God's authority. Besides, the biblical pattern will work; there is no reason to depart from it.

## 3. The divinely appointed institution

As some churches unlawfully function as man-made missionary societies, man-made missionary societies unlawfully function as churches. A missionary society takes free-will contributions in order to preach the gospel without charge and give relief to the needy (discussed later), as similarly a church does. Consider that if members of this society now only meet together and partake of the Lord's Supper and sing and pray, there is practically nothing different between their work and that of the church. This is effectively a man-made church. It is a human institution assuming the work God has ordained for the collective church as a body: the divine institution.

As individuals, we have complete authority to go about preaching the gospel anywhere and anytime, free of charge (Acts 8:4). However, if we would desire to cooperatively preach the gospel freely through an organized institution, we need to recognize that God has already ordained such an organization for this purpose: the local church. "Teach the gospel" does not mean "form an organization." A human institution is not an expediency for teaching the gospel, because something more is added. It is completely possible to teach the gospel to the whole world by no other organization than the Lord's church. However, when people believe, repent, and obey in baptism at the gospel preaching presented by a man-made organization, the organization gets the glory. It does not matter how much the organization claims that the glory belongs to God, the honor unavoidably goes to the organization.

Consider this from a secular perspective. Suppose a group of people recognize a need to save a certain endangered animal species from extinction and decide to work together to that end. They realize they do not have the necessary resources for the work, so they organize fund-raisers and obtain free-will contributions. With their acquired funds, they launch advertising campaigns to acquire more funds and more people to join the effort. They lobby government bodies to spare the animal's natural habitat from development. They employ scientists to study the animals and develop captive breeding and release programs. When the species makes a recovery, the praise naturally goes to the organization and its founders, no matter how much they might deny their worthiness. Still others seeing this result are encouraged all the more to join their cause, enlarging that organization and growing its notoriety and respect.

In like manner, any man-made organization which wins souls to Christ through preaching the gospel will inevitably receive praise and honor from men for their work. Any such human organization which does the work that God designed the church as an organization to do discredits and supplants the divine organization and robs it and its Founder of the glory and honor they rightfully deserve.

*2 Corinthians 8:18-24 And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, <sup>19</sup> and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, <sup>20</sup> avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us -- <sup>21</sup> providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. <sup>22</sup> And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. <sup>23</sup> If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. <sup>24</sup> Therefore show to them, and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.*

*Ephesians 3:21 To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

*Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

The scriptures make clear that all the glory for the shared work in the gospel is to fall upon Jesus Christ and His church alone. Our Lord did not die to establish a human institution. Any missionary society, college, religious publishing company, or other man-made corporation today which accepts free-will financial contributions and preaches the gospel without charge is essentially operating as a church: executing the function of the divine corporate body which God has appointed for this work. As much as we might suppose that some other institution or foundation is a better arrangement, any such organization is unnecessary, and it over-shadows the church which cannot be improved upon.

When previously discussing the distinction between individual and corporate action, we observed that scripture authorizes individuals for social, economic, domestic, and political activities. Concerning our collective action in these realms, God has not ordained any specific corporations. We may therefore form any kind of numerous community, business, domestic, or civic organizations as we please, as long as we otherwise adhere to wholesome, ethical, upright behavior. Individuals have the right to incorporate and establish social clubs, schools, parent-teacher associations, hunger relief foundations, human rights organizations, trade unions, manufacturing companies producing goods for sale and profit, service institutions such as hospitals, or any other kind of secular organization.

Proponents of institutionalism argue that as God does not forbid the formation of human institutions in secular matters, He also has nowhere in scripture forbidden the formation of human institutions in spiritual and religious matters. A study of authority in religion demonstrates that the question is not over what God expressly forbids but over what He expressly ordains. Concerning collective activity in secular matters, God has specified nothing. In spiritual or religious matters, God has indeed specified the organization through which He intends that we act cooperatively: the church. Where God specifies, we have no right to substitute. For example, since God specifies that we sing in worship, we cannot substitute playing an instrument because He doesn't say not to. Likewise, since God specifies that glory to Him is to be in the church (Ephesians 3:21), we cannot substitute a human institution because He doesn't say not to.

#### **4. Publishing companies**

Those who defend institutionalism in the church will claim their sponsoring churches or missionary societies operate the same as publishing companies. They argue that if their arrangements are unlawful, then only churches can lawfully print Bibles and study booklets, since such are also technically forms of teaching.

In first response, authority for our actions ought to be established upon scripture, not upon the actions or presumed inconsistency of others. Now let us examine whether missionary societies really do function merely as publishing companies.

The difference should become obvious when we compare this to an analogous secular example. Suppose a group of people have the printing equipment, knowledge, and savvy to go into corporate business publishing books of recipes for whole grain muffins. They sell these books for profit; customers pay a certain price and receive the book in equitable trade. This company is in the business of making money, not educating people. Even though their product is useful for instruction, they are still just a manufacturing company making money. Now suppose another group of people understand the health benefits of eating whole grain muffins, and they form an association, buying large quantities of these books with their own pooled or solicited



financial resources at their own volition for free distribution to spread the good word. This company is in the business of educating people, not making money. Clearly, the work for profit of the publishing company is not the same thing as the work of the non-profit distribution group. At this point in the reasoning process, this is all we are trying to establish: the two corporations are not merely doing the same thing. If the publishing company begins soliciting and accepting free-will contributions not for fair equitable trade and begins the distribution of their product to others without cost, they cease being a publishing company and become the same thing as the other educational company; they are simply making their own instructional material rather than buying it from some other source.

The reasoning process that is accepted in secular matters is often somehow rejected when applied to spiritual matters, due to preconceived ideas. Let's try to make unbiased application in the spiritual arena. As noted earlier, if God nowhere in scripture specifies the divine corporate enterprise for a certain group endeavor, we are free to form such business corporations and associations as we wish. Conversely, where God does specify, we cannot substitute.

Consider now a manufacturing company that publishes religious material, such as tracts and Bibles, and sells them at fair trade as a business for profit. God has nowhere in scripture specified the divinely appointed corporation for producing paper, manufacturing ink, and publishing religious material for profit at equitable trade. We are free to establish such money-making enterprises.

Now consider something altogether different: a corporation for collecting free-will financial contributions from concerned parties for the open distribution of religious teaching material without charge. In contrast, God has indeed ordained His divine institution to which He has precisely assigned this task for His glory: the church. We have no authority to substitute a human institution to perform the task God has specified for His church.

The following diagram illustrates the scriptural relationship between a publishing company and a church. Here the publishing company is making money and the church is teaching the gospel:



The diagram to follow illustrates an unscriptural arrangement and function. Here the church is no longer doing the work of teaching the gospel but has passed that responsibility and management to others:



In the illustration above, the publishing company is no longer acting only as a lucrative business company but also as a missionary society. If a church can sponsor a so-called publishing company to distribute tracts and Bibles, then a church can also sponsor a missionary society to send preachers:



To the contrary, both arrangements are unauthorized and therefore sinful. They strip the church of her responsibility to teach (1 Timothy 3:15) and deprive God of His glory (Ephesians 3:21). We will examine human institutionalism further when we discuss the work of benevolence of needy saints.

## E. Expediencies In Teaching The Gospel

We have noted some things that are not expediencies to teaching the gospel, so let's now examine some legitimate expediencies for gospel teaching. Remember that expediencies are only convenient means and methods for fulfilling generic commands. Furthermore, we do not need a specific scriptural example of a thing in order for it to be a valid expediency, as long as it does not add to, subtract from, or in any way alter the activity.

## **1. Printed exegesis**

Some Christians believe that Bible study outlines, workbooks, tracts, business cards, flyers, or any other such thing ought not be used. They claim that since all we follow is scripture, then these things are supplanting that one true source of authority. However, if that which is taught in the printed material is nothing different than what scripture teaches on a specific subject matter but in a more convenient format, then there is no supplanting, and it is a true expediency. Printed or projected material can include diagrams, charts, illustrations, or maps. You can use printed material or not use it at your discretion. It is nothing more or less than a possible method of gospel teaching. Besides, we know Paul uses this method. Not everything he writes for instruction in the gospel is preserved as scripture, but it is no doubt in conformance with it (1 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 4:16). Paul also explains the scriptures in his spoken teaching (Acts 17), as does Ezra (Nehemiah 8:7, 8). If these words can be delivered orally, so can they be in writing.

## **2. Classroom instruction**

Some Christians believe that separately assembled groups, such as children's, ladies', men's, and young adult, or new convert classes are wrong. They claim that this is division in the church and that there is no example in scripture of such a thing. However, if nothing more or less than Bible teaching is being conducted, these things are authorized by the generic command for the church as a body to teach the gospel. There is no real division here, as long as the gospel that is taught in the children's classes is the same gospel as is taught in the adult classes. It is nothing other than a possible method of gospel teaching. We can teach in small groups or in large, groups of old or of young, groups of men or of women. It is all still just gospel teaching. Division in the local church is not by teaching in different places or different times or to different audiences but by teaching different doctrines (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Moreover, we do not need to have a scriptural example for everything we do. We have no scriptural examples of church-owned meeting houses or songbooks, but these are authorized as expediencies for worship.

It will be further argued against children's classes that it is the responsibility of parents to teach the gospel to their children (Ephesians 6:4), and they ought not delegate this to others. Though a parent not teaching the gospel to his own child is supreme negligence, the parent is not necessarily the exclusive instructor God would approve for children. For example, Timothy learned from his grandmother as well (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). The apostles were instructed to take the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Moreover, the church as a body is not limited to teaching the gospel only by means of the assembly of the entire local body (Acts 15:4-6). Children's classes are also an expedient way of delivering gospel teaching that is age-appropriate or aligned with the spiritual maturity of the students (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2).

On the other hand, children's classes are not mandatory; they are only an expediency and matter of judgment. Anyone personally objecting has the right to not participate if they so choose, and elders do not have the authority to force them against their will. Notwithstanding, those who object should be careful before condemning others who participate on the grounds of the scriptural reasoning presented. More on this will be stated when we discuss worship in the church.

## **3. Multimedia**

The church in the first century had essentially only two media for teaching: speaking and handwriting on papyrus or parchment (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Timothy 4:13). It was not until around 1439 when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press that this began to appreciably change. The church today has many more options for teaching media than the early church could have imagined. Modern technology has given us personal computers to easily produce not only printed or projected material but digital audio and video recordings on a variety of media that now seems to change on a daily basis. Live or recorded audio and visual broadcasts are conveniently achievable using radio, television, or the internet. As long as nothing more than Bible teaching is being accomplished, the church has the authority to purchase and use to that end any and all existing and future communication equipment and services.

## **4. Aids and supporting items**

Any other device or component that assists in teaching the gospel which does not add to, subtract from, or in any way change the essence of the action is authorized by the command to teach. A biblical example of such a thing is found in Nehemiah 8:1-8. Here Ezra preaches to the assembly utilizing a wooden platform (pulpit, KJV; podium, NAU) that had been constructed "for the purpose." Modern examples include chalk boards, video projector screens, sound amplification systems, and electric lights. If a preacher uses a microphone or a pulpit, he is still doing nothing other than gospel preaching.

A church needs to carefully monitor the activities that are assumed to be merely teaching tools. A thorough understanding of hermeneutics and expediencies is critical. We will now list several unauthorized activities that sometimes creep into the church under the guise of teaching aids.

**a. Not expedient: drama**

Drama skits are not teaching expediencies; theatrics are added. The logical end would include auditions, set designers, set builders, a costume department, stage hands, script writers, directors, and choreographers. If at the end of such a production, the natural reaction for the audience is to applaud, we are obviously doing more than teaching; we are also entertaining. However, a mere expediency should add nothing to the action performed.

**b. Not expedient: gifts**

Give-away ink pens with a scripture or the church telephone number printed on them are not teaching expediencies; a gift is added. The logical end would include imprinted coffee mugs, key chains, ball caps, tee shirts, volley balls, baseballs, crayons, rulers, pocket knives, screw drivers, flashlights, or any other such object. These things pertain to much more than teaching; we are also giving a gift whose primary purpose has nothing inherently to do with Bible teaching.

**c. Not expedient: food**

Giving bread for children to eat in a Bible class when teaching that Jesus is the bread of life is not an expediency for teaching; eating is added. The logical end could include feeding them lamb, grapes, fish, olives, corn, quail, milk, honey, figs, cakes, or any other lawful food or beverage mentioned in the Bible. Obviously, this accomplishes more than teaching, so none of these things are actually expediencies for teaching.

We will further consider what are not teaching expediencies when we later discuss things that are not the work of the church.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Teaching The Gospel

1. Who has the Lord given in churches today for instruction in the word? How does this differ from the first century church?
2. What is the literal New Testament meaning of our English words "evangelize" and "evangelist?"
3. What is the meaning of "edification" as it is used in the New Testament? Is edification a categorical work of the church?
4. How are people converted to Christ?
5. When a church financially supports a gospel preacher by delivering him wages, is it fair to say that such a church is participating in his work?
6. Is it lawful for a church to send wages to a gospel preacher by funneling them through another church, a missionary society, or a college?
7. When a church sends wages for the support of gospel preachers through another church, a missionary society, or a college, what is lost? What is added?
8. What organization has God ordained to receive all glory for the preaching of the gospel?
9. In your own words, explain the significant difference between a publishing company and a church.
10. Are there any restrictions on where, when, how, or to whom the church may teach the gospel?

## V. A Work Of The Church: Worship

Although the gospel is taught when the church gathers for worship, the activities of the assembly are not teaching alone. For example, in the Lord Supper, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26). However, the bread and fruit of the vine are not mere expedients for teaching. Remember that expedients are unspecified optional and discretionary means and methods for conveniently executing a generic command. If the bread and juice are only expedient teaching tools, then we ought to have the authority to use hamburgers and soda pop for teaching tools as well. We ought also have the discretion to not partake of the Lord's Supper at all but teach using some other means or methods. To the contrary, expedients do not add to or alter the essence of the action in any way. Therefore, the bread and juice of the Lord's Supper are in fact not mere teaching tools, because more than teaching is being accomplished; we are also eating bread and drinking juice. We do not partake of the Lord's Supper as an "expedient" for the generic command to teach the gospel; we partake because we are specifically commanded to do so. For this reason, worship is considered a distinct work of the church apart from teaching the gospel.

### A. Worship Defined

Before going further, we should define worship. Investigation will show that there are two senses of worship described in scripture:

- Generally, fulfilling the everyday duties of a righteous life;
- Specially, paying tribute and homage to a divine being.

To explain, there is a sense in which everything an individual Christian does in life is worship to God, if he is shunning evil deeds and engaging in godly behavior. Simply working diligently each day and showing kindness in words and deeds is service to God, bringing Him glory. However, scripture reveals that there is a special way men worship God that is not a mere attribute of normal daily life. This distinction between special worship and everyday service to God is born out in several words of the Greek New Testament most commonly used for the worship of God, defined by Thayer as follows:

- LATREUO {lat-ryoo'-o} [verb form] 1) to serve for hire 2) to serve, minister to, either to the gods or men and used alike of slaves and freemen 2a) in the NT, to render religious service or homage, to worship 2b) to perform sacred services, to offer gifts, to worship God in the observance of the rites instituted for his worship 2b1) of priests, to officiate, to discharge the sacred office. (Acts 24:14).
- LATREIA {lat-ri'-ah} [noun form] 1) service rendered for hire 1a) any service or ministrations: the service of God 2) the service and worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law 3) to perform sacred services.
- EUSEBEO {yoo-seb-eh'-o} 1) to act piously or reverently 1a) towards God, one's country, magistrates, relations, and all to whom dutiful regard or reverence is due.
- PROSKUNEO {pros-koo-neh'-o} 1) to kiss the hand to (towards) one, in token of reverence 2) among the Orientals, esp. the Persians, to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead as an expression of profound reverence 3) in the NT by kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication 3a) used of homage shown to men and beings of superior rank 3a1) to the Jewish high priests 3a2) to God 3a3) to Christ 3a4) to heavenly beings 3a5) to demons.

#### 1. Service

The essence of LATREUO or LATREIA is serving: doing the desires of another. It is used of both the kind of worship that is the conformance to God's will in the actions of daily life and that which is the performance of appointed special religious rites, as indicated by the context. Note some examples of the 26 times this word family appears in the New Testament (indicated in bold):

*Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable **service**.*

*Hebrews 9:9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the **service** perfect in regard to the conscience --*

## 2. Reverence

The essence of EUSEBEO is to awe. Words in this family are typically translated "godliness" and "godly," indicating the somberness and respectfulness that would be expected before kings.

*NAU Acts 17:23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your **worship**, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you **worship** in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."*

William Barclay further explains that it is "not confined to the precincts of the church and is not limited to the worship and liturgy and the ritual of the church. True religion begins at home."

## 3. Obeisance

The unique essence of PROSKUNEO is to fall, kneel, or bow down at the feet of another: paying homage and obeisance. It is used of offering sacrificial gifts to and petitioning one in authority. The application is consistently of venerating and honoring another by some special act of reverence. Note some examples of the 60 times this word appears in the New Testament (indicated in bold):

*Matthew 2:11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and **worshipped** Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

*Matthew 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall **worship** the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "*

*Matthew 8:2 And behold, a leper came and **worshipped** Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."*

*1 Corinthians 14:25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will **worship** God and report that God is truly among you.*

*Revelation 4:10 The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and **worship** Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne...*

PROSKUNEO is not that form of worship in which we please God in our everyday actions.

## B. Attributes Of Worship

Observe our Lord's remarks on worship to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Two fundamental attributes of worship are revealed – spirit and truth:

*John 4:19-24 The woman said to Him,...<sup>20</sup> "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her,...<sup>23</sup> "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in **spirit** and **truth**.*

### 1. In spirit

The word translated "spirit" is PNEUMA {pnyoo'-mah}. Thayer's definition includes, "...2a) the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, decides... 3) a spirit, i.e. a simple essence, devoid of all or at least all grosser matter, and possessed of the power of knowing, desiring, deciding, and acting...." This indicates worship:

- From the heart, not merely from the lips in pretense (Matthew 15:8);
- With fervor, not perfunctory routine (Acts 12:5);
- In purity, free from carnality and interests of the flesh (Romans 8:1-8).

### 2. In truth

The word translated "truth" in John 4:24 is ALETHEIA {al-ay'-thi-a}, for which Thayer gives both an objective and a subjective meaning: "1) objectively 1a) what is true in any matter under consideration 1a1) truly, in truth, according to truth 1a2) of a truth, in reality, in fact, certainly 1b) what is true in things appertaining to

God and the duties of man, moral and religious truth 1b1) in the greatest latitude 1b2) the true notions of God which are open to human reason without his supernatural intervention 1c) the truth as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man, opposing alike to the superstitions of the Gentiles and the inventions of the Jews, and the corrupt opinions and precepts of false teachers even among Christians 2) subjectively 2a) truth as a personal excellence 2a1) that candour of mind which is free from affection, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit." This indicates the following:

**a. Objectively**

- That which is true no matter what (2 Thessalonians 2:10-13; 2 Peter 2);
- That which is authorized in God's word (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Peter 3:15-17);
- That which is not subject to corrupt human opinions (Mark 7:7-9);

**b. Subjectively**

- Worship performed in sincerity and integrity (Matthew 21:23-27);
- Worship not founded upon emotions (James 1:14-16; Colossians 2:4-8);
- Worship not founded upon personal feelings (Proverbs 14:12).

### **C. Worship In The New Testament Church**

With the meaning of worship and its attributes well defined, let us now observe in scripture the activities of worship we see ordained for the local church as a corporate body distinguished from acts of worship performed by individual Christians.

A more thorough investigation of worship activities within the church and the common controversies involved are covered in a separate study.

#### **1. The Lord's Supper**

We have already briefly discussed the Lord's Supper in order to establish assembled worship as a work of the church separate from teaching. The following passages show that this activity is indeed an appointed sacred service for expressing reverence in the assembled church.

*Matthew 26:26-29 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."<sup>27</sup> Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.<sup>28</sup> For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.<sup>29</sup> But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."*

*1 Corinthians 11:18-30 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it...<sup>23</sup> ...I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;<sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."<sup>25</sup> In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.<sup>27</sup> Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.<sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup....*

Notably, God has ordained and specified the collective church as the body through which the Lord's Supper is to be observed.

#### **2. Singing**

We previously noted that the Lord's Supper is not an expediency for teaching. This is also applicable to singing. Scripture clearly indicates that we are to teach when we sing, but we are doing more than teaching; we are also singing. If singing is nothing more than an expediency for teaching, then we should also have the authority to use dance or drama as an expedient teaching tool as well. We should also have the option to choose not to sing but utilize some other convenient methods of teaching instead. To the contrary, neither

singing, dancing, nor drama are teaching expediencies, because they incorporate additions to the action; we are doing more than only teaching. The church as an assembled body does not sing as an "expediency" for fulfilling the generic command to teach; we sing because we are specifically instructed to do so. Similarly, the church as an assembled body does not dance, perform drama, play musical instruments, or do any other such thing, because we are not instructed to do so. These things are additions, not teaching expediencies.

The following passages show that singing spiritual songs is indeed an ordained sacred service for expressing reverence, supplication, and an offering to God.

*Ephesians 5:18-20 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Colossians 3:16, 17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> 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.*

*Hebrews 2:12 ...Saying: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."*

*Hebrews 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*

*Revelation 15:3, 4 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! <sup>4</sup> Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."*

### **3. Praying**

Prayer is perhaps the purest form of worship. From the heart, words of honor, praise, adoration, reverence, and thanksgiving are simply expressed. In prayer, supplication is made to Him whom the speaker acknowledges as having the power to work in him and the sovereign rule over the universe. Unsurprisingly, Luke records many instances of prayer among early church gatherings.

*Acts 4:24-31 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.... <sup>29</sup> Now, Lord,... grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word..." <sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*

*Acts 12:5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.*

*Acts 13:1-3 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*

*Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

*1 Timothy 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;*

### **4. The collection**

Some Christians today, disparaging orderliness and routine in assembled worship services, are claiming that giving is not a commanded act of worship for the church as a body. In rebuttal, examine the words of Paul to the Corinthians:



*1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup> On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*

They claim that the only reason the church in Corinth is taking a collection is as an expediency to relieve what will be needy saints in Judea when the famine occurs as prophesied (Acts 11:28-30). Not so; look carefully. The reason for the collection is precisely because they are specifically commanded to do so, not as an expediency for fulfilling some generic command. Remember: for a thing to be expedient, it must not be specified, but Paul here specifies the collection as a mandate. "Orders" in verse 1 translates DIATASSO {dee-at-as'-so}, which means "1) to arrange, appoint, ordain, prescribe, give order" (JHT). This word is rendered "commanded" in Acts 18:2 (NKJ) with reference to an edict from the emperor. Paul gives the same instructions on giving to the Galatian churches, and what he ordains in any church, he ordains in them all (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17). Moreover, the verb in the original phrase translated "so you must do also" is in the present tense, active voice, and imperative mood, meaning we ought to be continually and regularly doing it. Conclusively, giving is commanded of the church. Now examine Paul's words further:

*2 Corinthians 9:11-14 ...while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. <sup>12</sup> For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, <sup>13</sup> while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, <sup>14</sup> and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.*

In verse 12 the word "service" is from LEITOURGIA {li-toorg-ee'-ah}. Thayer explains its biblical usage to include "a service or ministry of the priests relative to the prayers and sacrifices offered to God" (Luke 1:23). The Greek-English lexicon of Louw and Nida further states that the verb form means, "to perform religious rites as part of one's religious duties or as the result of one's role" (Hebrews 10:11). Indisputably, giving is a form of worship, and to debate otherwise is contentiousness. Consider this: little is required of us to sing and pray and take the Lord's Supper, but nothing is typically regarded as more of a personal sacrifice to a man than that which he is asked to offer from his wallet.

As noted earlier, God has ordained and specified the corporate church as the body through which the collection is to be performed. We will further examine giving when we later discuss the treasury of the church and its purpose.

## **5. Teaching**

We have already established that gospel teaching is a work of the church; however, the academic question before us now is whether it is an act of worship. In the sense that preaching is a prescribed sacred service, a divine ministry, and an expression of respect for God, it fits the spirit of LATREUO and PROSKUNEO: terms for worship defined earlier. The people in Ezra's day certainly considered preaching an act of profound reverence.

*Nehemiah 8:5-8 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.... <sup>8</sup> So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.*

Consider this: if teaching the doctrines of men is vain worship, then teaching the commandments of the Lord must be true worship (Matthew 15:9). Moreover, scripture reveals that early church gatherings for other worship forms typically included time for gospel preaching.

*Acts 20:7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.*

*1 Corinthians 14:23-31 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. <sup>25</sup> And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. <sup>26</sup> 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.*

## **6. Baptizing**

Furthermore, teaching men that they need to be baptized is not the same kind of thing as teaching them to be diligent in work, honest in business, and sober in behavior. Baptism is not an aspect of everyday life but a sacred, religious service and token of sublime submission (Luke 7:29, 30). It therefore conforms to the special sense of worship as defined earlier: PROSKUNEO.

## **7. The essence of worship in the church**

All indications in scripture of worship within the church as a corporate body are in the sense of rendering religious service or homage, performing sacred services, offering gifts, observing instituted rites, making obeisance, expressing reverence, or making supplication to God. Such activities are consistent with PROSKUNEO by definition.

Conclusively, worship in the church as a body is not that form of service rendered by each man's diligence in the duties of everyday life. For example, gardening, carpentry, cooking, and sewing are noble individual pursuits, generally speaking, and God is glorified when we engage these with sensibility and integrity, but these are not worship services in the sense of paying homage and obeisance. Similarly, even though our bodies are temples of the Lord for His glory (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20), nevertheless, personal hygiene, nutrition, physical exercise, and such things are normal aspects of everyday life, not special acts of veneration offered in reverence to a divine being, and they are therefore not works of the church as a body.

## **D. Worship Expediencies In The Church**

Expediencies can take many forms. Any convenient means, methods, or tools to assist in doing a thing without changing it into something else or adding something to it is authorized by the generic command.

### **1. Expediencies for the Lord's Supper**

We must have unleavened bread and grape juice to participate in the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29). We can use store-bought bread or home-made. If home-made, we need an oven. The church has authority to own an oven for making communion bread. Similarly, we can use store-bought grape juice or home-made. If home-made, we need white, red, or black grapes from which to squeeze juice. The church can buy them or grow them. The church has authority to buy a winepress and a tract of land on which to grow grapes for communion juice. The church can buy a cabinet for storing the bread or flour and a refrigerator for storing the grapes or grape juice. The church can buy serving trays and cups for distribution. Many of these methods are arguably not the most convenient for us, but for other people in different times or places, they may well be. However, we cannot deny that these are mere expediencies, if in the end we are doing nothing more and nothing less than eating bread and drinking juice in communion. All other supporting elements and actions are authorized by a necessary inference.

### **2. Expediencies for singing**

To sing together, we must have some way to agree on what psalm we will be singing, at what time we will be singing it, and in what musical key we will sing. Unavoidably, some brother will need to either be assigned or volunteer to lead by making these decisions for the group: a "song leader." He can use a pitch pipe to determine the key. He can mark the timing by hand. The church has the authority to buy songbooks or video projectors and screens to aid in providing the lyrics and sheet music, as long as in the end, we are doing nothing other than singing hymns and spiritual songs (1 Corinthians 14:15).

### **3. Expediencies for praying**

In order to pray as a group, only one man must be speaking at any given time. If two or more are speaking at the same time, confusion is the result (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). Unavoidably, some brother will need to either be assigned or volunteer to lead the prayer while the others listen, pray along in heart, and confirm. The one praying can use a microphone. The church has the authority to write together a list of all the things they want to pray about, and the leader can use this list while praying. If we are doing nothing other than praying, all these means and methods are authorized.

### **4. Expediencies for the collection**

Any means or methods of gathering funds is lawful, as long as it is done on each first day of the week by free-will offerings from individuals as they have prospered and purposed in heart (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; 2

Corinthians 9:7). Beyond this, we can pass around a bucket, a tray, or a basket. We can also just put this container by the door so contributions can be conveniently made at any time during that first day of the week. We can also all just hand our contribution to one designated to gather the funds - a deacon, perhaps. Some Christians may think that the collection needs to be a ceremonial activity or a formalized worship ritual, as it is traditionally conducted in many congregations. There is nothing unlawful in doing so, but there is also no scriptural precedence which would bind this upon us. As long as the contributors all understand what they are doing and are doing it with decency and orderliness (1 Corinthians 14:40), any mode or method is authorized.

## **5. Expediencies for teaching**

### **a. Outreach**

The apostle Paul highly praises the Thessalonian church for their efforts to spread the gospel not only in their nearby location but also into regions far away.

*1 Thessalonians 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.*

A church conscientious about the divine ordinance to be forth-tellers of the gospel to the world will never be content with satisfying minimum requirements or with perfunctory weekly meeting-house preaching efforts. Instead of limiting corporate teaching efforts to worship assemblies, a church can be working to arrange instructional classes in homes, hotels, schools, prisons, or nursing homes, wherever or however possible, in addition to newspaper, radio, television, or internet work or supporting preachers outside the local body. With all this, the treasury should never grow out of control. Fundamentally, there is more to the work of the church as a body than assembling for worship (Acts 19:5-10).

*1 Corinthians 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.*

A problem occurs when a congregation adopts the notion that the work of the church as a local body is limited to worship assembly activities. This might more easily happen today in areas of generally good prosperity in comparison to earlier times and where churches are seldom burdened with real physical needs among the saints (the relief for whom is a separate work of the church to be discussed later). Moreover, if a church is characterized by complacency concerning outreach evangelizing, they will imagine they are meeting their responsibility in this area as long as the gospel is only preached as part of their traditional bi-weekly public worship services and bi-annual "gospel meetings." Such a church can easily run up enormous amounts in the Lord's treasury while paying for little more than building maintenance and Lord's Supper supplies.

### **b. Bible classes**

Consequently, once a church accepts that their ordained work as a body is limited to "worship service" activities when they are all assembled together, then separate age-appropriate children's classes begin to indeed look like a "breaking off" from the church. Consider the fallacy of this reasoning.

If a church can arrange for a gospel preacher to speak at an assisted living facility, for example, it does not constitute division in the church, even if the whole church isn't at that assembly. Indisputably, parents can likewise teach their children. If numerous parents want to teach all their children together, they can do this. If no one's home can hold them all, the church can provide teaching space at the church-owned meeting house, if available. If they can meet at 1:00 PM Thursday afternoon, then they can alternatively meet at 10:30 AM Sunday after the whole church assembles. There is no reason to view this as "breaking off" from any other thing. It is nothing other than a means of gospel teaching, a work of the church, which the elders are to oversee (Acts 20:28).

## **6. Expediencies for baptizing**

As baptism is the desired result of gospel preaching, some pool of water is necessary. In Bible examples of baptism, natural streams and rivers are utilized, however, to the extent that this action is generic, we are not limited to those examples. A baptistery or any other pool or tub with sufficient water volume, owned, rented, or borrowed by the church, is a lawful expediency.

*John 3:23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized.*

*Acts 8:36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"*

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Worship

1. Is the Lord's Supper just another expedient way of teaching the gospel? Is singing hymns just another expedient way of teaching the gospel? Explain your answers.
2. In what two senses is worship described in scripture?
3. What two attributes of God-approved worship does Jesus reveal in John 4?
4. Explain in your own words what it means to worship God in spirit. Explain what it means to worship God in truth.
5. Do the scriptures reveal matters of absolute truth, or are all matters subject to each one's own speculation?
6. What is the primary purpose of the Lord's Supper?
7. Is laying by in store as described in 1 Corinthians 16 an act of worship in the church? In what special way is this activity particularly consistent with homage and obeisance?
8. Can teaching the gospel and baptism be legitimately considered acts of worship in the church? Explain your answers.
9. List five or six expediencies commonly utilized in assembled worship in the church.
10. Are children's Bible classes, men's Bible classes, and ladies' Bible classes expediencies for gospel teaching?

## **VI. A Work Of The Church: Benevolence Of Needy Saints**

### **A. Benevolence Among Individuals**

Our primary purpose of this study is to examine the work of the church as a local, corporate institution in contrast to the work of individual Christians. However, we will begin considering benevolence by discussing the role God has placed upon the individual. This will help us make the distinction when we later come to discuss the work of the church as a body in this area.

#### **1. Individual responsibility**

The scriptures make clear that God places responsibility on every living human to be attentive to the physical needs of all others, whether of those within the church or without (Matthew 25:31-46). The contexts of following verses clearly indicate that the instructions are directed to individuals, not to the church as a corporate body.

*Romans 12:10-13 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love...<sup>13</sup> distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*

*Galatians 6:9, 10 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

*Ephesians 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

*1 Timothy 6:17, 18 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.<sup>18</sup> Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share.*

*Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

*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.*

*1 John 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

"Visit" in James 1:27 translates EPISKEPTOMAI {ep-ee-skep'-tom-ah-ee} which means "1) to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes 1a) in order to see how he is, i.e. to visit, go to see one 1a1) the poor and afflicted, the sick 1b) to look upon in order to help or to benefit 1b1) to look after, have care for, provide for..." (JHT). This includes more than just stopping by to say "hello" (James 2:15, 16).

#### **2. The scope of benevolence among individuals**

Though God places the responsibility of benevolence upon all and for all, He places the primary responsibility for the benevolent care of others upon their families (Matthew 15:1-9).

*1 Timothy 5:3-8 Honor widows who are really widows.<sup>4</sup> But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God...<sup>8</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

Notwithstanding, God has imposed a limit upon who is eligible to receive our benevolence, whether by the individual or by the church. He commands that we not assist those who are in need from an unwillingness to work. Assisting them will only drive them to further laziness rather than motivating them (Matthew 25:24-30).

*2 Thessalonians 3:10, 11 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.<sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*

### 3. Hospitality

The word "hospitality" in scripture translates PHILONEXIA {fil-on-ex-ee'-ah}, meaning, "1) love to strangers..." (JHT). This word and its verb form occurs in scripture five times (Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9).

*Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to **entertain strangers**, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.*

Notably, scripture never uses these words to describe the work of the church as a body – always the individual. The corporate church is not a hospitality club; it has no authority to provide coffee and donuts for Bible study gatherings.

## B. Benevolence Within The Church

We now turn our attention to benevolence performed by the church as a corporate body.

### 1. Scriptural examples

From the inception of the church, we see a sharing spirit among Christians. The Bible shows by recorded examples that the local church has the responsibility to take care of the physical needs of saints among them who are unable to take care of themselves on their own. Let's observe the scriptures revealing this.

*Acts 2:44, 45 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.*

*Acts 4:32-35 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> 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,<sup>35</sup> and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

*Acts 6:1-4 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.<sup>2</sup> Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;<sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

*Acts 11:26-30 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.<sup>27</sup> And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.<sup>28</sup> Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.<sup>29</sup> Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.<sup>30</sup> This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

*Romans 15:25-28 But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.<sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.*

*1 Corinthians 16:1-3 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:<sup>2</sup> On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.<sup>3</sup> And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*

The entire chapters of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 reveal much about this work, but these excerpts are presented for the discussion.

2 Corinthians 8:1-6 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: <sup>2</sup> that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, <sup>4</sup> imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. <sup>5</sup> And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. <sup>6</sup> So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.

2 Corinthians 8:13-15 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; <sup>14</sup> but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack -- that there may be equality. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."

2 Corinthians 8:19-23 And not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind... <sup>23</sup> If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:1 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you.

NAU 2 Corinthians 9:12, 13 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.

1 Timothy 5:5-16 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. <sup>6</sup> But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. <sup>7</sup> And these things command, that they may be blameless. <sup>8</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. <sup>9</sup> Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, <sup>10</sup> well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. <sup>11</sup> But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, <sup>12</sup> having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. <sup>13</sup> And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. <sup>14</sup> Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. <sup>15</sup> For some have already turned aside after Satan. <sup>16</sup> If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

## 2. Limited responsibility of the church

### a. To saints

In all cases where we see the church as a body acting in the benevolent relief of the needy, it is exclusively for the saints – the brethren, faithful Christians. Those who proclaim that the church has responsibility in benevolence toward "all men," including those outside the church, will sometimes cite 2 Corinthians 9:13 for their attempted proof. The KJV renders the end of that verse as "your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men." Note carefully that the word "men" is added by the translators. The phrase is more accurately rendered "and to all," as in the NAU and YLT. To determine the antecedent of "all" we must look at the context to see who the writer is talking about. Having concluded his remarks about the repentant fornicator and about Titus in chapter 7, the author begins discussing benevolence of the church back in chapter 8, identifying "the ministering to the saints" as his new subject matter (vs. 4). He reminds us what he is talking about in 9:1: "the ministering to the saints." He reiterates it once more in 9:12, stating that their ministry "supplies the needs of the saints." When Paul says "all" in verse 13, we are forced to conclude he is talking about all **saints**, which would be those they are now supporting and all those they might in like manner support in the future.

Those who teach benevolent church responsibility toward all men sometimes also cite Acts 2:45 for attempted proof, which states the disciples "were sharing ... with all, as anyone might have need." In the same manner, we need to determine by the context the antecedent of "all" and "anyone." In verses 41 through 44, they are identified as those who "gladly received his word and were baptized," those who continued "in the apostles'



doctrine," and "all who believed." The same logic is applicable in Acts 4:32-35. This does not open the door for any non-saints to receive benevolence from the church as a body.

The church as a collective body is never seen in scripture ministering to the physical needs of people of the whole world, only Christians. In fact, the church could not do it if it tried. If the church were to assume this universal responsibility without limitation or bias, it would immediately and totally drain all treasury funds, as there is no end to poverty, sickness, and suffering in the world. This would consume all the needed resources for the greater spiritual work of teaching the gospel. In God's wisdom, the burden of ministering to the needs of people outside the church has been placed upon individuals and not the church so that it may do what God has actually appointed it to do.

Intuitively, a Christian who falls away from the faith is an unworthy saint: no longer eligible for benevolence from the church (Romans 16:2). This will become more clear when the characteristics of saints are examined in later sections of this study.

### **b. To the needy**

The word translated "need" in Acts 2:45; 4:35, Romans 12:13, Ephesians 4:28, and 1 John 3:17 is CHREIA {khri'-ah}. Thayer indicates it is that which is a "necessity" (Acts 6:3, YLT). Much of the instruction in scripture regarding benevolence in the church pertains to the necessary food that would be lacking when the prophesied famine strikes (Acts 11:28, 29). In our prosperous, North American society today, we abuse the word "need." Most of what we claim we "need" are only things we "want" in reality. Considering this, we commonly recognize the necessities of life to be limited to food, clothing, and shelter (1 Kings 17:1-16; 2 Kings 4:8-11). Beyond this are luxuries.

*Psalm 37:25 I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.*

*1 Timothy 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*

*James 2:15, 16 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,....*

Those who need to have their car repaired, lawn treated, grass mowed, or garage cleaned are not truly in need. It is wonderful to see individual brethren help others in efforts like this, but it is not the work of the church as a body to assist in such non-essential things.

In Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 5, the benevolence is for needy widows in particular. In almost any era and culture, widows are especially vulnerable. There appears to be no mention of health or life insurance in scripture, but secular history indicates there were early societies for care and help with funeral expenses during Greek and Roman rule (ref: TBA). Though the law of Moses made provision for the care of orphans and widows (Deuteronomy 24), the neglect of widows was commonplace in New Testament times. A parable of Jesus relates to a widow who had to continually annoy a judge in order to obtain justice (Luke 18:1-5). In the law of Christ, our Lord makes sure that needy widows are not neglected.

In Acts 6, a need arose concerning widows going hungry. To meet this need, seven men were appointed by that local church for the distribution of their food. If that need went away, the relief and their work would also have gone away. Where there is no legitimate need, there is no benevolence from the church.

### **c. To widows indeed**

In Timothy 5:5-16, the inspired apostle stipulates further limitations on who is eligible for benevolence from the church. The text presents an apparent contradiction which deserves some explaining. In this passage, relief is authorized only for widows meeting some very specific qualifications, but in other passages cited, the church is sending support not to widows only but to all Christians in the Judean churches in need of famine relief. To harmonize the verses, we should note carefully what is essentially different between the relief for needy saints in general and that for the widows indeed.

In 1 Timothy 5, the widow to receive benevolence is destitute with no possible means of future recovery. She is old enough that remarriage is in all practicality not an option, and she is alone, with no children or grandchildren to support her. This need will therefore never go away until her passing, and hence, the support, once started, ought never go away, as long as she maintains her godliness. Correspondingly, the verb "burdened" in verse 16 is in the imperative mood and the present tense, which "signifies action in progress or state in persistence" (Dana and Mantey), if she qualified. However, the church is not to be so burdened if she is younger or has family, since her need will eventually go away when she either remarries or her family steps up to their responsibility. If a young widow were to be placed on full-time, perpetual support

from the church, she would be tempted to avoid remarrying in order to honor the church's commitment or to not lose her benefit. Then, as physical desires naturally develop, she could easily be drawn away by Satan from purity and into fornication. On the other hand, if she is never placed on this support in the first place, she will be all the more encouraged to remarry, as is God's will to avoid fornication (1 Corinthians 7:1-9).

Similarly, if a widow with family were to be placed on full-time, continuous support, her family would have little practical reason to ever give her aid as God has ordained. It would be unjust for them to escape this responsibility while others are made to bear it. Our Lord makes abundantly clear His contempt for those who claim a loophole from their family responsibilities (Mark 7:6-13). On the other hand, if she is never placed on this support in the first place, her family will be all the more encouraged to shoulder their responsibility, if for no other reason to avoid the shame of being marked as disorderly and disfellowshipped by the church, if they are Christians (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

Let us now compare this with the circumstances of benevolence to needy Christians in general elsewhere. In Acts 11:28-30, Luke records that the disciples determined to send a gift, that they then also did, and that the famine actually happened. All those verbs occur in the aorist tense, which Dana and Mantey explain: "The fundamental significance of the aorist is to denote action simply as occurring.... It presents the action or event as a 'point,' and hence is called 'punctiliar.'" This is a one-time contribution in response to a one-time circumstance. In Romans 15:26-28, the action is likewise expressed in the aorist tense, and Paul declares that he intends to finish it (NAU). He similarly urges the Corinthians to complete a contribution which they had begun (2 Corinthians 8:6), which would bring it to a conclusive end.

To summarize, the difference is that 1 Timothy 5 describes the special circumstance of on-going contributions for a qualified and continually sustained need. Other benevolence revealed in scripture not so bound by these special qualifications apply to different circumstances involving one-time contributions for transient needs only.

### 3. Qualifications of widows examined

#### a. Wife of one husband

Further discussion is warranted regarding the widows indeed in 1 Timothy 5. One qualification is that she was to have been the wife of one man (verse 9). In the original language, this is expressed as a simple idiom: "one man woman." Koine Greek has no special words for "wife" or "husband." When we read about men and husbands or women and wives in our English New Testament, the same words are used for both in the Greek. The distinct English words indicating the married state are chosen by the translators as the context suggests. Thayer defines the terms as follows:

- ANER {an'-ayr} 1) with reference to sex 1a) of a male 1b) of a husband 1c) of a betrothed or future husband....
- GUNE {goo-nay'} 1) a woman of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow 2) a wife 2a) of a betrothed woman.

An identical idiom is used in the qualification of elders, except with the genders reversed and in the present tense (state in persistence): "one woman man" (Titus 1:6).

As these words describe men and women unmarried, about to be married, currently married, and formerly married alike, the reasonable understanding is that the idioms remove the ambiguity in the absence of words for "husband" and "wife" in the vocabulary. It is a **married** man or woman.

The word "one" is from MIA {mee'-ah}, defined as "1) only one, someone," (JHT). This word is used both to exclude the plural and also to indicate an individual, a particular one, as a certain city (Luke 5:12) or a certain day (Luke 5:17). The context will indicate whether or not the intention is numeric. For the qualification of the widow (and of an elder as well), it is not numeric. Furthermore, as this is expressed in the genitive case, indicating a relationship, an equally valid translation is "the woman of a man."

To expound, consider a man whose wife of his youth deceased early in their marriage, but he remarried and raised children together with his second wife of now over 40 years. It is unreasonable that such a man could not be elder because he had more than one wife in his lifetime. The law of God is not illogical (Acts 17:2). The stipulation is simply that an elder must be a currently married man. Likewise, the stipulation for the widow is that she had to actually have been married. If she had lawfully remarried and both her husbands were deceased, she would still be qualified.

This begs another question. If "widow" (CHERA {khay'-rah}) means "a woman whose husband has died" (Louw-Nida), then why would Paul add "has been the wife of one man," if it means nothing more? The answer is for emphasis: the same reason he adds "really" in verses 3, 5, and 16, which translates ONTOS {on'-toce}, meaning "1) truly, in reality, in point of fact, as [opposed] to what is pretended, fictitious, false, conjectural 2) that which is truly etc., that which is indeed" (JHT). This unequivocally removes all speculative circumstances and disqualifies any woman:

- who claims to have been previously married but cannot produce evidence for it,
- who previously lived in adultery with a man now deceased, for which she has repented,
- who is alone without the man yet living from whom she is divorced.

If we learn nothing else from this, be sure that the Holy Spirit is here stating that we need to be careful about how the Lord's treasury is used, that it is not abused for illegitimate purposes.

#### **b. Well reported for good works**

In verse 10, Paul states another qualification: "well reported for good works." The punctuation provided by the NKJ and YLT translators suggests that the following points are simply non-exhaustive examples of the kinds of deeds that would characterize such a woman:

- if she has brought up children,
- if she has lodged strangers,
- if she has washed the saints' feet,
- if she has relieved the afflicted,
- if she has diligently followed every good work.

Closer examination shows that the punctuation is appropriate. In each case, the particle "if" is EI {i}, and the verb is in the indicative. Thayer translates this: "if, whether." Friberg explains that this conditional particle, meaning "if" or "since," has many special usages, including "(1) with the indicative to express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled: *since, because* (Romans 2:17)...."

In simpler terms, Paul is not enumerating a compliance checklist of specific actions the widow must have executed; he is illustrating in general the kind of behavior typical of good works. Even in English, the word "if" does not always indicate a condition of acceptance but sometimes a condition of fact:

*1 John 3:13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if (EI) the world hates you.*

Consider a woman who did all those things, except she never washed saint's feet, which could be very likely in today's culture where foot washing is unnecessary with modern shoes and paved walkways. How silly to require a woman today to execute this contrived formality in order to be put on the list. Consider also a legitimately needy widow who was never able to conceive children, which would contribute all the more to the likelihood of her being in need. These specific examples do not limit the generic requirement, "well reported of good works."

In contrast, for a condition of acceptance, one thing is not permitted as long as another thing is not produced. For this idea, a different word in Greek is typically used, EAN ME {eh-an' may}, meaning "if not, unless, except (Matthew 5:20)" (Friberg).

*Matthew 6:15 But if (EAN ME) you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

*Luke 13:3 I tell you, no; but unless (EAN ME) you repent you will all likewise perish.*

*James 2:17 Thus also faith by itself, if (EAN ME) it does not have works, is dead.*

The qualities listed in 1 Timothy 5:10 indicate conditions of fact (EI); they are not conditions required for acceptance (EAN ME).

## C. Church Co-operation In Benevolence

Scripture indicates that churches in the first century cooperated with one another in the realm of benevolence. However, we see this only by approved examples; we have no direct recorded commands or statements concerning this. Review again the following texts:

- Acts 11:28-30
- Romans 15:25-28
- 1 Corinthians 16:1-3
- 2 Corinthians 8, 9

The recorded examples indicate that funds from one church were always sent directly to another church for those elders to distribute to the needy saints among them as they deemed appropriate. Churches did not send their contributions to a benevolent society, orphan's home, or any other man-made institution. As these examples are uniform, we must conclude that the authority had to be specific and follow the pattern to the same degree. Some people think that the church as a body is being unreasonable and uncaring if it is not involved in tending to the physical needs of the world. However, there is no scriptural precedence for doing so. Scriptural relief for needy saints can therefore be simply diagrammed this way:

Church —\$—> Another Church c/o Elders —\$—> Needy Saints Among Them

Note in scripture that those who managed the delivery of the funds of the churches were always messengers of those churches, not messengers of a benevolent society. Individuals selected by the churches did the delivery, not other churches or man-made organizations. Thereby, the glory in all things sacred always goes to the church, not a human institution.

## D. Heresy In The Church Today Over Benevolence

### 1. Church-supported orphan children

Since church benevolence is limited only to the saints, we need to understand who saints are in order to understand the scope of this work of the church. The word "saint" translates HAGIOS {hag'-ee-os}. Its definitions from Greek scholars include the following:

- Thayer: "2. set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his."
- Friberg: "... (2) of persons holy, pure, consecrated to God, ... 5) as a substantive, ... as human beings belonging to God: *saints, God's people, believers.*"
- Louw-Nida: "pertaining to being holy in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essentially divine qualities in contrast with what is human...."
- UBS: "set apart to or by God, consecrated; holy, morally pure."

This word in scripture describes the following individuals:

- Faithful believers, devoted members of the church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:15-23);
- Those in whom Christ dwells through faith and who comprehend His love (Ephesians 3:17-19);
- Those who have made the conscious decision to deny fleshly desires and commit themselves to Christ (Ephesians 5:3; Revelation 14:12);
- Those willing to endure imprisonment or death for their religious convictions (Acts 26:10);
- The called out and elect whom God justifies and for whom Christ makes intercession (Romans 8:26-34);
- Those who have been sanctified, calling upon the name of the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:2);
- Those capable of judging righteousness in the world (1 Corinthians 6:2).

This rules out any non-Christian, including infants and small children. Infants and children are sinless and innocent (Matthew 18:3; 19:14). Infants do not inherit the sin of their ancestors (Ezekiel 18:20). Sin is a conscious act of defiance against the law of God (James 1:14, 15). Small children are incapable of such awareness and hence not accountable (Jonah 4:11). They have not the cognitive ability to perceive right and wrong on their own (Isaiah 7:16). Having no sin nor need for forgiveness, they have not called upon the

name of the Lord, and they have not separated themselves from sin unto the Lord. Moreover, God has no need to sanctify them or justify them, and Christ has no need to make intercession for them. Small children are not consecrated believers and hence are not saints: not subjects of church benevolence.

Children, by nature, must depend upon others for sustenance. According to God's plan from the beginning, this task is assigned to their family. A sad circumstance occurs when a child's parents die. As tragic as this is, it is a mistake to automatically assume that the church as a body has the authority to support them. Had God ordained His church for this task, He would have revealed it in His word. Though we may think the church ought to take the responsibility in the matter, there is no scriptural basis for it. Factually, there are other means God has appointed for the support of orphan children other than by His church.

With further consideration, we can see God's wisdom in this. There is a point in the life of a child when he goes from exemption and innocence (Deuteronomy 1:39; Jeremiah 19:4, 5) to accountability and guilt (Romans 3:23; Hebrews 4:12, 13). This point, which we accommodatively call the "age of accountability," is not a fixed age revealed by scripture, but it varies with the maturing of each individual. Others cannot know when this actually occurs, but each individual and God, who searches the hearts of men, will know (Acts 1:24). For Jesus, this apparently occurred at around age twelve (Luke 2:40-52). Here resides a dilemma; the age at which a child matures enough to be independent and self-providing does not usually coincide with his age of accountability. It is therefore possible for an orphan to still require full support and yet be in open, conscience rebellion to the law of God. It is inequitable that such an individual be supported by the church; light has no fellowship with darkness (1 John 1:5, 6). If a church supports such an individual, they could be fellowshipping evil unaware. However, God, in His wisdom, prevents this by authorizing church benevolence for saints alone. Even if we cannot see the wisdom in this, we should be content with what God has ordained in His scriptures (Isaiah 55:9).

On the other hand, note that a dependent orphan of accountable age who obeys the gospel is a saint, a consecrated believer, and is eligible for direct support from the church, should he be legitimately in need.

## 2. Church-supported benevolent societies

When man forms benevolent societies and human organizations to care for needy saints, he supplants the divinely instituted organization for this task: the church. Again, we cannot come up with a better way than God's. Man forms an unscriptural arrangement when he inserts a different organization or institution into the process of delivering relief from the church treasury to saints in need. Moreover, churches act without authority if they distribute treasury funds to anyone other than needy saints. The following arrangements are unscriptural:

Church —\$—> Benevolent Society —\$—> Needy Saints

Church —\$—> Orphans' Home —\$—> Non-Saints

When the inserted institution is another church, it is simply a church acting as a benevolent society, and no such arrangement is revealed in scripture. The following arrangement is unscriptural:

Church —\$—> Another Church —\$—> Church With Needy Saints

Scripture indicates that each church is autonomous and supervises its own work. No church ever relinquishes the control of its contributions for another church to distribute to other churches according to their own judgment. Such an arrangement is not an expediency, because it adds another layer of management and compromises church autonomy. True expediences add or subtract nothing.

It is important to note in scripture that support was only sent from one church to another when there was a needy saint among them. A church never received contributions from other churches to build up a surplus fund to have on hand in case needs arose. Each church generated its own treasury storage by collections every first day of the week. Also, churches with an abundance always sent relief to churches having needy among them, never the other way around. Human reasoning might suggest building a "super church" with deep pockets ready to serve any needy saint anywhere. The scriptures do not support an arrangement such as this:

Church With Needy —\$—> Another Church With Abundance —\$—> Saints **Not** Among Them

This arrangement would create an imbalance in the churches, which ought not be:

*2 Corinthians 8:13-15 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; <sup>14</sup> but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there may be equality. <sup>15</sup> As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*

### **3. Direct support of needy saints not among the local church**

A church as a corporate body engages in unscriptural practice if it directly takes care of the needy saints of another local body. The elders' oversight is limited to their own local body; elders have no oversight in other local bodies. The following action is unscriptural:

Church —\$—> Needy Saints **Not** Among Them

A common ploy is sometimes observed when a visitor to the worship assembly of a local church claims he is a Christian but is in need of money for his hungry family. This man ought to be associated with a local church somewhere or be intending to do so (Acts 9:26-28). The responsibility for his need for benevolence falls not upon the church he is visiting but on the local church with whom he is affiliated. That body and its elders will know for certain whether he is a faithful Christian deserving aid. If that church does not have the financial ability to aid him, other churches are to send support to them so that they may (Acts 11:30). Churches ought not side-step this pattern by giving relief directly to one not among them, which would relieve the elders of the other church of their duty. We frankly do not have any other Bible pattern for the church, and we dare not act outside the revealed pattern. If individual Christians would decide to make a gift for him independent of the church's treasury, they can certainly do so (Galatians 6:10), but adhering to the Bible pattern for the church as a body prevents the possibility of church funds being used to support someone unworthy. Again, we may think the matter is insignificant, but any action without God's authority is sin.

### **E. Benevolent Societies**

To clarify, there is nothing inherently wrong about a man-made benevolent society that gives relief to all men. Consider our earlier examination of evangelizing. Man sins when he forms an institution by which Christians work cooperatively to teach the gospel free of charge. The reason it is sin is because God has already designed and appointed the church to do precisely that, so any human corporation assuming its role supplants the church. However, regarding the benevolent relief of all mankind, God has established no divine institution. If He had, we could not lawfully devise a substitute for it but could only act within that divine institution for that divine purpose. Therefore, since God has not appointed any such organization, man supplants no divine institution if he establishes his own. We are free to devise and support all kinds of benevolent, business, social, health, or political organizations, as long as they are doing nothing inherently unwholesome and are not doing the work that God has precisely appointed for His church.

The only problem with benevolent societies involves who is providing their funding. Remember that God authorizes individuals in things He does not authorize the church as a body. An individual has every right to contribute to a benevolent society if he so desires. It is an expedient way of doing good unto all men (1 Timothy 6:18). Moreover, since God has not ordained any human institutions, He has no rule over them, except in what would be inherently immoral. Therefore, the ABC Cupcake Company has every right to contribute to the XYZ Benevolent Society.

However, the church is a divine corporation, and God certainly has rule and control over its function (Ephesians 1:22). God has not ordained that His church as a corporate body be responsible for the benevolent relief of all mankind. Therefore, a church contributing to an orphans' home, hospital, or school is not an expediency, because something other than the appointed work of the church is being accomplished. God has ordained that funding for those legitimate organizations be acquired from sources other than His church.

The following actions are scriptural:

Individuals —\$—> Needy People

Individuals —\$—> Benevolent Society —\$—> Needy People

Human Institutions —\$—> Needy People

Human Institutions —\$—> Benevolent Society —\$—> Needy People

The following actions are unscriptural:

Churches —\$—> All Needy People

Churches —\$—> Benevolent Society —\$—> All Needy People

Churches —\$—> Benevolent Society —\$—> Needy Saints

Note that even if the man-made benevolent society is ensuring that it only gives relief to faithful Christians, there is no authority for a church to contribute to it. This is contrary to the divine pattern (Exodus 25:40). It relieves the church of its obligation to manage its own work; the duty to prove the worthiness of the recipients is passed off to others who are not a church. If a man-made benevolent society is doing the work God has ordained for the church, it supplants the church and robs God of His glory (Ephesians 3:21).

## F. Misunderstanding Church Benevolence

Many arguments can be heard by people today trying to defend the practice of churches supporting the needs of non-Christians or contributing to man-made benevolent societies. However, we find no scriptural authority for such action by the church as a body, neither by a command, example, or necessary inference. The responsibility of supporting orphan homes and schools is placed upon the individual, not the church as a corporate body:

*James 1:22-27 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. <sup>25</sup> But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. <sup>26</sup> If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. <sup>27</sup> 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.*

Observe that in this context, the exhortation is clearly directed to individual Christians, not the church as a corporate body: vs. 22 "prove **yourselves...**," vs. 23 "if **anyone...**," vs. 24 "...kind of **person...**," vs. 25 "but **one...**," vs. 26 "**anyone** thinks **himself...**," vs. 27 "keep **oneself** unstained...." If we can disregard that the instruction given here is to individual Christians, we must disregard it everywhere.

Here are some arguments commonly presented by some trying to justify the church supporting man-made benevolent societies. Responses follow:

### 1. Misunderstanding individual and corporate distinction

**Argument:** "Whether it is the individual worshipping or the congregation worshipping cannot be distinguished. It is unreasonable to consistently interpret all passages on nothing more than pronouns to make a distinction binding something only on individuals and saying there is no relevancy to the body of Christ."

**Response:** Simply because someone says something is indistinguishable or unreasonable does not make it so. Human reasoning is not our source of authority. Where God's word makes a distinction, we must make a distinction. Our examination of scripture so far demonstrates that making a determination between individual and corporate applicability is not as difficult as those who argue against it would suggest (Hebrews 5:12-14).

### 2. Misunderstanding religion

**Argument:** "Pure and undefiled religion involves caring for orphans and anyone in need, not just saints (James 1:27, Galatians 6:10). It is irrational to suggest that the church cannot practice true religion."

**Response:** The word "religion" in James 1:26, 27 translates THRESKEIA {thrace-ki'-ah} meaning, "Appropriate beliefs and devout practice of obligations relating to supernatural persons and powers - 'religion, piety'" (Louw-Nida). The word applies to worship both in the generic sense of everyday uprightness and in the special sense of offering obeisance, whether by an individual or the church as a body. However, we are not forced to conclude that any activity having a personal religious significance necessarily has a place in corporate church function. For instance, true religion also involves an individual bridling his tongue, and this is not something the church as a body can do for anyone. Moreover, regarding certain widows that some teachers would claim should be assisted by the church, Paul says, "Do not let the church be burdened" (1 Timothy 5:16).

### 3. Misunderstanding sound reasoning

**Argument:** "To not allow the church to support orphans' homes makes the church a group of orphan haters – heartless and unloving. How could an all-loving God deny support from the church treasury for these innocent little ones who comprise the kingdom of heaven?"

**Response:** A study of hermeneutics will expose some fallacies of reasoning. This argument involves the fallacy of pity, which tries to persuade from considering the supposed unfortunate consequences that will befall others if a certain premise is true. Another is the fallacy of emotion, which utilizes language intended to arouse strong feelings that have no actual bearing on truth.

In truth, God most certainly has not left orphans or any other needy people without aid; He has simply not commissioned His church to that task in every case. Through the church, God has appointed to provide relief specifically for those who are "needy saints," but even then with limitations and restrictions. However, through individuals, God has appointed to provide benevolent relief for all others.

We ought to be willing to follow the Lord's instruction for no other reason than He has revealed it to us. Notwithstanding, with closer inspection, we can see God's wisdom in putting the responsibility for helping needy non-saints upon individuals.

If individuals are each doing their part to help the needy, it can result in more face-to-face interaction with those suffering. We observed earlier that "visit" in James 1:27 means more than merely going and seeing, however, it most certainly does include going and seeing. People who are in physical need inevitably have emotional needs, too. If we simply throw money into a pot to pay for others to go and do the work of encouraging and consoling, we ought not think we are actually helping them directly. When Jesus is foretelling the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46, speaking to the righteous, He does not say, "I was sick, and you paid someone to visit Me; I was in prison, and you paid someone to come to Me."

Additionally, any resulting personal interaction of individuals seeing to the needs of those outside the church creates situations ideal for teaching them the gospel. Jesus performed some miracles to do nothing more than demonstrate His divinity, such as turning water into wine. However, by going out to the people and by His innumerable miracles of healing, He also demonstrates His compassion. Those He would heal He would also often teach (Matthew 4:23-5:2). Similarly, the needy of the world will know that we are His servants if we personally bring them not only what they physically need but also what they spiritually need.

### 4. Misunderstanding the silence of the scriptures

**Argument:** "James 1:22-27 gives no authority to condemn the congregation made up of individual members from doing the action described collectively as a body from its treasury."

**Response:** Authority is established on the basis of what the Bible says, not on what the Bible does not say (Hebrews 7:14). No sound Bible student will proclaim that James 1:22-27 forbids the church as a body from supporting orphan's homes but only that it approves individuals doing it. If someone is looking for the scripture that authorizes the church as a body to do so, he will have to look elsewhere. Such a scripture has not yet been found.

### 5. Misunderstanding expediencies

**Argument:** "We have general directions from the Scriptures and can deal with the treasury in matters of expediencies. We can expedite the command to help orphans either through the congregational treasury or by individuals as we may freely choose."

**Response:** This opens a Pandora's box. Someone else has just as much right to argue that something else is an expediency. You can't just say supporting an orphan's home is a matter of expediency but supporting other good works such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the YMCA, Planned Parenthood, the National Cancer Society, hospitals, health clubs, daycare centers, and political campaigns are not. If you take one, you have to take them all, and there will be no end. That which proves too much proves nothing.

This is effectively where religion has gone today; religious organizations are supporting all kinds of institutions doing good like this, but biblical authority for the church as a body to be generically doing good has not yet been found. God places the responsibility for doing these things squarely upon the individual, not the corporate church.



Besides, a study of authority will reveal that there are rules for expedencies. According to one rule, for a thing to be expedient, it must be lawful. There are many lawful human organizations through which we can expedite helping the needy of the world if we want to, but God has not ordained the church as a body to do so, and we must not force our will upon it (Colossians 3:17).

## 6. Misunderstanding the authoritative source

**Argument:** "We cannot find Bible authority for water fountains, sinks, and commodes, so we don't necessarily need authority for the church to support orphan's homes."

**Response:** Remember, the responsibility to show delegated authority rests upon those who would do a thing, not those who would not (1 Peter 3:15). It is absurd to think that authority for what we do rests in the things others do without authority. Besides, a study of hermeneutics will show that we actually do have authority for drinking fountains and such things as expedencies for the bodily needs of people when assembled.

## 7. Misunderstanding incidentals

**Argument:** "We have no Bible authority for red, blue, or green carpeting in the building that is paid for from the congregational treasury."

**Response:** Whether we have carpet or tile in our building is neither here nor there. It has nothing to do with supporting orphans homes. These are incidental matters. In the same way, many lights in an upper room have nothing to do with the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7, 8). We will examine incidental matters in greater detail when we later discuss things which are not the work of the church.

## G. Summary

The pattern is consistent throughout the New Testament. The church is seen in scripture functioning autonomously as a collective body, and these are fundamentally the only things they are doing:

- Teaching the gospel (1 Timothy 3:15),
- Assembled worship (1 Corinthians 14:23-26),
- Benevolence of needy saints (2 Corinthians 8, 9),
- Withdrawal of unruly saints (1 Corinthians 5).

Activity in the corporate church beyond this is stepping outside the bounds of God's word (2 John 9).

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Benevolence Of The Saints

1. Is hospitality a work of the church as a corporate body? Is every action with a religious significance necessarily a work of the collective church?
2. Whom do the scriptures indicate are the ones having the first responsibility toward the needy?
3. Are there any limitations or guidelines on who an individual should offer benevolence to? If so, what? Explain your response.
4. Describe concisely for whom the church as a body is responsible for benevolent assistance. Explain the limitations of this benevolence.
5. What is the significant difference between the famine relief for the needy Judean saints in Acts 11:28-30 and the "widows indeed" in 1 Timothy 5:5-16?
6. When churches cooperated in benevolence as revealed in scripture, did one church ever send relief funds directly to the needy saints of another local body?
7. When churches cooperated in benevolence as revealed in scripture, did one church ever channel relief funds through another church for them to distribute to yet other churches having members in need?
8. When churches cooperated in benevolence as revealed in scripture, did one church ever send relief funds to a man-made benevolent organization for them to distribute to the needy?
9. Are man-made benevolent societies just expedencies for the church in the relief of needy saints? If not, why – what is added, lost, or otherwise changed?
10. Are man-made benevolent societies scripturally unauthorized or inherently sinful?

## VII. The Treasury Of The Church

### A. A Storage Of Resources

For the intent of this study, a treasury is understood to be nothing more than monetary funds or needed goods stored up and saved to meet current known and future unknown needs in the church.

*1 Corinthians 16:1-3 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup> On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. <sup>3</sup> And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.*

In verse 2, "storing up" is from the verb form of a family of words with definitions by Thayer as follows:

- THESAURIZO {thay-sow-rid'-zo} [verb form] "1) to gather and lay up, to heap up, store up 1a) to accumulate riches 1b) to keep in store, store up, reserve 2) [metaphorically]. so to live from day to day as to increase either the bitterness or the happiness of one's consequent lot."
- THESAUROS {thay-sow-ros'} [noun form] "1) the place in which good and precious things are collected and laid up 1a) a casket, coffer, or other receptacle, in which valuables are kept 1b) a treasury 1c) storehouse, repository, magazine 2) the things laid up in a treasury, collected treasures."

The English words "treasury" and "thesaurus" are directly derived from THESAUROS. In the passages that follow, the words indicated in bold are translated from THESAUROS or its kindred forms.

*Matthew 6:19-21 Do not **lay up** for yourselves **treasures** on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but **lay up** for yourselves **treasures** in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your **treasure** is, there your heart will be also.*

*1 Timothy 6:18, 19 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, <sup>19</sup> **storing up** for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

*James 5:3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up **treasure** in the last days.*

Note particularly in James 5:3 that the word is used of a monetary treasury of funds reserved for future use. The authority for having a church treasury is derived from the direct command in 1 Corinthians 16, but there is a necessarily inferred connection to the basic need of the church to pay for things pertaining to its work.

### B. The Purpose For The Treasury

The apostle Paul makes clear what the reason for maintaining the treasury is: "That there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:2). Conclusively, the contributions each member puts aside are to be gathered into a common collection of church funds. It is not reasonable that Paul is instructing each of them to create their own private reserves at home. If each one had their own private treasury, then when Paul comes to administer the delivery of the gift, these private treasuries will all have to then be gathered into a common collection in preparation for delivery. This is the very scenario Paul wants to avoid.

#### 1. Monetary funds: ownership and control

The money collected no longer belongs to or is controlled by the individuals; it now belongs to and is controlled by the Lord as He regulates within His church as a collective group. This concept of ownership and control transfer is clearly seen in scripture:

*Acts 4:36 - 5:4 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup> having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>1</sup> But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. <sup>2</sup> And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? <sup>4</sup> "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

The implication is this: whether it is the property that money can buy or the money that can buy property, ownership and control are the same for both. When Ananias and Sapphira are holding the property, it is theirs to control. When they exchange it for money, it is still theirs, and they still have control of it. However, when they give the money to the apostles, they no longer have ownership and hence also no longer have control of it; the apostles do. The same is true for the church treasury: there is no difference between the Lord's money and the things it can buy.

## **2. Economics: property and intent**

The question frequently arises over whether there is divine authority for a church to draw interest on funds kept secure in a bank. There is certainly room for opinions here. We can all agree that a non-interest-bearing method of securing funds is authoritative, but exactly how to expedite such a method in modern times is not easy to conceive. For example, cash could be kept in a vault owned or rented by the church, but monetary disbursements on a cash-only basis are not only unsafe in many circumstances but are sometimes downright impossible or even illegal. A bank-managed checking account is an expedient way of handling disbursements, but many such accounts earn interest as a matter of standard policy.

There are natural rules of finance involved in any economy functioning on a legal tender basis: depreciation, appreciation, inflation, and interest. The variable of time plays a part in each. Interest describes the time-value of money, whether earned or paid. For example, a church can expediently assemble for worship and for teaching in a place that is either rented or owned. If a church should decide to purchase property for these purposes, interest can be paid if the funds are not available for an outright cash purchase, which is the same in reverse principle as interest earned on a checking account. These economic principles are recognized in scripture (Deuteronomy 23:19, 20). We should consider whether we are good stewards of the Lord's money if we refuse these common benefits.

*Matthew 25:25-27 "And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours." <sup>26</sup> But his lord answered and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. <sup>27</sup> So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest."*

Consider the reason a church puts money into a bank. A church does not put money into a checking account for the express purpose of earning interest; the intent is only to lay it aside and store it up, ready for use (1 Corinthians 16:2, 3). The fact that it might earn interest is coincidental. The church is certainly not now going into the investment business.

Consider similarly that a church does not purchase a meeting house with the intent of raising revenue by appreciation; the purpose is for doing the Lord's work. Suppose a church needs to buy a larger meeting place, and they sell their current property for more than they paid for it. The fact that it might have appreciated is coincidental. The church is certainly not now going into the real estate business. These differences ought to be apparent.

Nevertheless, if brethren are of the opinion to conscientiously avoid any kind of interest-bearing checking account for the church treasury, they do not sin. However, be careful before condemning others who consider it a matter of coincidence and would do so. We make closer examination of coincidental matters later in this study, which will give the Bible student more to consider on the subject.

## **C. The Use Of The Church Treasury**

If God appointed the first century church to maintain a storage of funds (1 Corinthians 16:1-3) and to perform certain works, it stands to reason that they would have used those ordained treasuries to pay for those appointed tasks:

- Teaching the gospel (Acts 13:1-5),
- Providing for assembled worship (Acts 20:7),
- Relieving the needy saints (Acts 11:26-30).

There is no example of a church-owned meeting house in scripture, but that does not mean we have no authority for one. Scriptural authority is not derived by approved example alone. Authority for a church-owned meeting house comes by necessary inference from the scriptural requirement for the church to assemble together (Hebrews 10:25); it is intrinsically impossible to assemble without a place to do it. Now

the place can expediently be large or small, new or old, brick or wood, rented or owned. A church-owned meeting house is only an optional expediency for fulfilling the generic command to come together as a church (1 Corinthians 14:23-28). If nothing other than teaching and worship is being conducted, a church-owned building is only an expediency.

## 1. Collective action

Notably, when we apply the principles established earlier regarding individual and corporate activity, we understand that anything that is done with the Lord's treasury is done by the collective church. Since the treasury is generated by collective action, every use of it depends upon and is inextricably linked to that collective action. For example, if an individual member of the church purchases light bulbs with the Lord's treasury and replaces some in the meeting house, the entire contributing body has a share in this. For scriptural examples, Paul explains that the contribution of each individual in Corinth results in a collective sharing in the benevolent work (2 Corinthians 9:7-14). To the Philippians, he explains that, through their contributions, they collectively share in his personal evangelism.

*Philippians 1:3-7* <sup>5</sup> ...[I thank my God] ... for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,... <sup>7</sup> just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

*4:15* 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.

## 2. Limitations of use

As the church is only to perform authorized practices, so then the church's money, which belongs to the Lord, is also to be used only for authorized practices. Since the Lord's money is His to be used only for His authorized work, then the things bought with the Lord's money are also His to be used only for His authorized work. Therefore, the church-owned meeting house and furniture ought not be used for parties or secular celebrations. The church-owned copy machine ought not be used for cupcake recipes or basketball tournament brackets. The church-owned video projector ought not be used for secular business or entertainment.

This is often a misunderstood concept. Though some might see clearly that the church's treasury should not be utilized to pay for unauthorized practices, they are often willing to use the building and equipment paid for with the church's treasury for unauthorized practices. People attempting to validate secular or recreational activities in the church will argue that a church-owned meeting house or related property is not holy or sacred. This relates to the idea of venerable objects worthy of worship, as would be associated with idolatry or with some rites of Roman Catholic doctrine. The further implication of this argument is that this is surely a thing undeniable, accepted, and understood. After all, the building is only bricks and wood. Let's take a closer look.

## 3. Holy things

In English, "holy" primarily means having the quality of divinity: exalted and worthy of our devotion. However, the original Hebrew words often translated as "holy" in our English Old Testament have multiple meanings as follows:

- QADASH {kaw-dash'} [verb] "1) to consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to be set apart, be consecrated 1a2) to be hallowed 1a3) consecrated, tabooed 1b) (Niphal) 1b1) to show oneself sacred or majestic 1b2) to be honoured, be treated as sacred..." (BDB).
- QADOWSH {kaw-doshe'} [adjective] "1) sacred, holy, Holy One, saint, set apart" (BDB).
- QODESH {ko'-desh} [noun] "1) apartness, holiness, sacredness, separateness 1a) apartness, sacredness, holiness 1a1) of God 1a2) of places 1a3) of things 1b) set-apartness, separateness" (BDB).

These words describe not only a divine nature worthy of our worship but also the characteristic of being separated from others in order to be dedicated to a special service. The difference in sense is demonstrated in the following examples:

*Leviticus 10:3* And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as **holy** [venerable]; And before all the people I must be glorified.' " So Aaron held his peace.

*Leviticus 11:44, 45* For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore **consecrate yourselves**, [QADASH] and you shall be **holy** [QADOWSH]; for I am **holy** [QADOWSH]....

*Ezra 8:28* Then I said to them, "You are **holy** to the LORD, and the utensils are **holy** [dedicated]; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers."

Why are the temple utensils in Ezra's day holy? It is not because they are objects of veneration but because they belong to the Lord, not the people.

*Leviticus 20:26* And you shall be **holy** [QADOWSH] to Me, for I the LORD am **holy** [QADOWSH], and have **separated** you from the peoples, that **you should be Mine**.

*Joshua 6:19* But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are **consecrated** [QODESH] to the LORD; **they shall come into the treasury of the LORD**.

The rules of ownership and control are reflected in the Jewish laws of dedication and redemption in Leviticus 27. According to the law, if a man dedicates a piece of his property to the Lord, the priest assesses its fair value (verse 14), and the property no longer belongs to the one dedicating it but it becomes holy, that is, it now belongs to the Lord (verse 28). Should the man ever want to have it for himself again, he must redeem it by paying the assessed value plus one-fifth, and it will then again belong to him (verse 19).

The original Greek words translated "holy" in our English New Testament likewise mean either worship-worthiness or dedicated.

- HAGIAZO {hag-ee-ad'-zo} [verb] "1) to render or acknowledge, or to be venerable or hallow 2) to separate from profane things and dedicate to God 2a) consecrate things to God 2b) dedicate people to God 3) to purify 3a) to cleanse externally 3b) to purify by expiation: free from the guilt of sin 3c) to purify internally by renewing of the soul" (JHT).
- HAGION {hag'-ee-on} [adjective] "1) reverend, worthy of veneration 1a) of things which on account of some connection with God possess a certain distinction and claim to reverence, as places sacred to God which are not to be profaned 1b) of persons whose services God employs, for example, apostles 2) set apart for God, to be as it were, exclusively his 3) services and offerings 3a) prepared for God with solemn rite, pure, clean 4) in a moral sense, pure sinless upright holy" (JHT).

The different senses are likewise revealed by the context. For example, Peter quotes Leviticus 11:44 and explains that the reason we should devote ourselves to the Lord is because He is worthy of our homage.

*1 Peter 1:14-16* ...as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; <sup>15</sup> but as He who called you is **holy** [venerable], you also be **holy** [dedicated] in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> because it is written, "Be **holy**, for I am **holy**."

*1 Peter 2:9* But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a **holy** [dedicated] nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

*Revelation 4:8* The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "**Holy, holy, holy** [venerable], Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

As discussed earlier, the noun form, HAGIOS, is often translated "saint" when used of Christians: those belonging to Christ. The verb form is often translated "sanctify" when the implication is of being set apart:

*Romans 15:16* ...that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, **sanctified** [HAGIAZO] by the **Holy** [HAGION] Spirit.

*Romans 15:25* But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the **saints** [HAGIOS].

Therefore, consider that church-owned meeting houses and all associated property are truly holy in the sense of belonging solely to the Lord and being set apart and dedicated for His particular uses. Review the meaning of HAGION: "...set apart for God, to be as it were, exclusively his services...." Remember also from earlier in

our study that the English word "church," first used of the meeting house, is derived from KURIAKON: "belonging to the Lord." The church-owned meeting house does not belong to man and hence is not under his control for his own purposes.

Those attempting to justify utilizing church property for social or recreational purposes might seek to blur this distinction concerning possession, citing, "The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness" (Psalm 24:1). Since all things belong to God anyway, and we are merely stewards, it could be argued that it is the Lord's money whether it comes from the church treasury or from individuals, so it makes no difference. This is absurd, illogical, and in clear conflict with scripture. It is a confusion between a generic and a specific sense of ownership, and it trivializes the offering. For example, the offering for the tabernacle does not become the Lord's in a special way until the people bring it (Exodus 25:1-8).

#### **D. The Abuse Of Church Property**

Consider again the illustration of a church member purchasing light bulbs with the church treasury. Now if he uses them for his personal use in his own home, the church as a collective body still participates in this as well. However, as this is not an ordained work of the church, the entire collective church participates in the abuse. We earlier established that the Lord's treasury is not limited to the monetary funds in store; it includes things the funds have purchased, such as the building. Therefore, any unauthorized work for which the church building is used is also fellowshiped by the entire congregation collectively, even if not every member attends the function. For this reason, every member of a local body ought to be aware of how the Lord's money and the Lord's property is being used, unless they become unwitting partakers of unauthorized practices (Ephesians 5:11).

Consider also that if a church rents its meeting place, then the time for which the church has paid for it is likewise the Lord's and should be used for doing the church's work. Though some might suggest we conduct secular activities in a building purchased with the Lord's funds, it is not likely they would suggest we conduct secular activities in a rented facility and ask the church to pay for it. However, there is no difference in principle.

There is an abuse in Nehemiah's time similar to the abuse today of social or recreational events in church-owned meeting houses. In Nehemiah 13:4-9, the priest sets up a residence for one of the officials: Tobiah. This is not Tobiah's place. The temple belongs to the Lord; it is sacred, special, set apart, and devoted to a divine purpose. Eliashib and Tobiah make it a common or profane thing; Nehemiah throws him out.

Another similar abuse occurs during the time of Christ. Twice in our Lord's career, scripture indicates that He forcefully drives money-changing merchants out of the Jewish temple, over-turning their tables (Matthew 21:12, 13; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-16).

*Mark 11:15-18 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>16</sup> And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. <sup>17</sup> Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" <sup>18</sup> And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.*

Commentators explain that the money changers are taking advantage of the people for profit. Some might suggest that, by His reference to "a den of thieves," the abuse is all that Jesus is condemning. However, if Jesus only wants to stop the abuse, He does not need to drive out the animals necessary for sacrifice with a whip. The point Jesus is making is that the temple is provided for spiritual purposes, not carnal; this is not the time or place for commerce. Now if someone today would come into a church-owned meeting house and knock over the tables at a social or recreational event, some among them would likely seek a way to destroy him, too.

The argument is made that the church has a building just sitting there most of the time going to waste; why not use it for some good work? Remember, the action justifies the expediency, the expediency does not justify the action. Besides, authority is established by a scriptural command, example, or necessary inference. An under-utilized meeting house authorizes nothing. Moreover, if the building is truly going to waste, perhaps we need to find more ways to utilize it for authorized works of the church.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: The Treasury Of The Church

1. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, NKJ, what is the meaning of the word translated "storing up" in the original New Testament Greek language?
2. What is the reason for the collection and storage of funds as revealed in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3?
3. Is it wrong for a church to pay interest on a loan to buy a piece of real estate for no other reason than to assemble to do the work of the church?
4. Is it wrong for a church to loan money to another church so that they can purchase property for the same purposes?
5. Is it wrong for a church to buy a piece of real estate for no other reason than to assemble to do the work of the church? Is it wrong for a church to buy a piece of real estate for no other reason than to monetarily earn by appreciation?
6. Who owns the money that is collected into the treasury of the church? Who controls the money that is collected into the treasury of the church?
7. What is the practical difference, if any, between the Lord's money and the things that it buys?
8. If there is no example in scripture of a church-owned meeting house, where is our authority for such?
9. What are the two distinct meanings of "holy" as we see in scripture?
10. Is a church building a holy thing? Explain your answer.



## VIII. Carnal Influences In The Church

### A. The Flesh And The Spirit

#### 1. Human nature

God created man with two parts: a **fleshly**, outward, physical, temporary part, and a **spiritual**, inward, rational, eternal part (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Ephesians 6:12). The original New Testament word translated "spiritual" is PNEUMATIKOS {pnyoo-mat-ik-os'}, but the word translated "fleshly" (or "carnal" in the King James version) is:

SARKIKOS {sar-kee-kos'}, meaning: "fleshly, carnal 1a) having the nature of flesh, ... governed by mere human nature ... with the included idea of depravity,... pertaining to the ... body: related to birth, lineage, etc." (JHT).

This is the adjective form of the noun translated "flesh:"

SARX {sarx}, meaning: "1) flesh ... of both man and beasts 2) the body ... born of natural generation, ... the sensuous nature of man ... without any suggestion of depravity, ... the physical nature of man as subject to suffering, 3) a living creature ... whether man or beast, 4) ...mere human nature ... and therefore prone to sin..." (JHT).

#### 2. Wholesome or depraved

Conclusively, there are carnal pursuits that are lawful, such as working to meet the needs of the body with food, clothing, and shelter, and fulfilling wholesome desires for family and physical comfort (Romans 15:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 9:1-14). Notwithstanding, though meeting the needs of the flesh is certainly necessary in life, an emphasis in fulfilling the requirements of the flesh to the neglect of our spiritual needs is unrighteousness before God (2 Corinthians 10:2, 3; Galatians 5:13-17; 6:8; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 2:18; 2 Peter 2:18; 1 John 2:16).

Conversely, there are also carnal pursuits that are inherently sinful, such as debauchery, fornication, drunkenness, and gluttony. The faithful Christian will certainly put away the depraved pursuits of the flesh (Romans 8:1-8; 1 Peter 2:11).

The question to consider now is whether the wholesome pursuits of the flesh are included in the God-ordained work of the church as a corporate body.

### B. An Earthly View Of The Church

A worldly mindset about things pertaining to the church is the fundamental concept that moves the church today away from the spiritual work God has ordained for it. Carnal mindedness centers on physical things: the needs of the flesh and concerns of the here-and-now.

#### 1. Modern-day Sadducism

The Sadducees were a sect of the Jews that did not believe in spirits, angels, or the resurrection (Acts 23:8). Since the gospel message proclaims a risen Savior, the Sadducees were, not surprisingly, responsible for much of the persecution in the early church (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17, 18). Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Sadducees still finds its way into the early church, as Paul frequently admonishes those Christians who deny the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

The results of Sadducism today are the teachings and practices in religious organizations that focus on helping men attain success in this physical life without regard to the spirit or a view toward the resurrection. For example, most denominational outreach programs involve feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, aiding victims, financial advice, or entertainment with little or no gospel preaching or exhortation to repentance. Those carnal concerns are certainly good works, but if these things are the mission, the church has little in reality to offer a dying world lost in sin.

*1 Corinthians 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.*

## 2. Carnal mindedness

Our study has earlier shown that the only carnal work God reveals in scripture appointed for the collective church is to meet the essential physical needs of destitute faithful Christians. Other than this, the work of the church is not carnal; it is spiritual: teaching the gospel and serving God in worship. However, when carnal mindedness permeates the body, all kinds of other activities begin to be engaged for which the church has no scriptural authority. Let us be reminded of admonitions from scripture against carnality:

*John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."*

*Romans 8:5-14 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. <sup>8</sup> So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God...*

*1 Corinthians 2:12-15 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. <sup>13</sup> These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. <sup>14</sup> But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup> But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*

*1 Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; <sup>3</sup> for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*

*2 Corinthians 10:3-7 (NAU) For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. <sup>5</sup> We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, <sup>6</sup> and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. <sup>7</sup> You are looking at things as they are outwardly.... (2 Corinthians 1:12)*

Attention to the needs of the flesh has its proper place, but beyond the relief of needy saints, God has appointed these concerns not to the church as a body but to the individuals. Let us look now at some ways that carnal influences come into the Lord's church today.

### C. Understanding Fellowship

The term "fellowship" appears in our English New Testament translations primarily from the Greek word KOINONIA, described as follows:

- KOINONIA {koy-nohn-ee'-ah} [noun form] "1) fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse 1a) the share which one has in anything, participation 1b) intercourse, fellowship, intimacy 1b1) the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office) 1c) a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship" (JHT).

Though this noun is usually translated as "fellowship" in our English Bibles, it also appears as "contribution" (NKJ Romans 15:26), "communion" (NKJ 1 Corinthians 10:16), "partnership" (NAU 2 Corinthians 6:14), and "sharing" (NKJ Philemon 1:6).

The verb form of this word, KOINONEO, gives us further insight and is described as follows:

- KOINONEO {koy-no-neh'-o} [verb form] "1) to come into communion or fellowship with, to become a sharer, be made a partner 2) to enter into fellowship, join one's self to an associate, make one's self a sharer or partner" (JHT).

This verb is rarely translated as "fellowship" (ASV Philippians 4:15). Typical word usage includes "distribute" (NKJ Romans 12:13), "partake" (NKJ 1 Peter 4:13), "share" (NKJ Galatians 6:6), and "participate" (NAU 2 John 1:11).

Observe again that the definition includes "the share which one has in anything." We understand that this centers upon a sharing, but the particular applications are diverse, as it can involve literally anything. Therefore, the meaning is ambiguous without reference to some specific shared aspect of relationship or activity. For examples: fellow workers share a common goal (Philemon 1:1), fellow citizens share a common country (Ephesians 2:19), fellow prisoners share a common fate (Colossians 4:10), fellow heirs share a common promise (Ephesians 3:6), and fellow soldiers share a common enemy (Philemon 1:2). In the Greek writings of the Septuagint, KOINONIA describes those sharing their lives in marriage (3 Maccabees 4:6) and the sharing of words (Wisdom 18:8). All these express fellowship in one form or another.

The term "fellowship" appropriately describes all kinds of sharing in anything: spiritual or carnal. In spiritual fellowship, fellow Christians share a common body, a common Spirit, a common hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God, and Father (Ephesians 4:4-6). In assembled worship, we pray, sing, teach, give, and take the Lord's Supper together. In carnal fellowship, we might share our food, supplies, services, or time together in social and recreational activities.

The task before us now is to determine in what realms scripture authorizes fellowship within the church as a corporate body compared to authorized fellowship among Christians as individuals. Remember that the term "fellowship" is ambiguous without reference to some specific aspect. It is meaningless to simply claim that the church as a body is authorized to "have fellowship" without some specific application in view. Furthermore, just because people have fellowship in one thing does not necessarily mean they automatically have fellowship in something else. For example, people who are fellow soldiers are not necessarily also fellow citizens; perhaps they are only allies from different countries. Likewise, just because the church as a body has fellowship in spiritual things does not necessarily infer that it also has fellowship in carnal things. Furthermore, just because Christian individuals have fellowship in one thing does not necessarily mean that the church as a corporate body also has fellowship in that thing.

Let us now examine fellowship among individuals and fellowship within the church as observed in scripture. If we are going to understand in what realms God has ordained fellowship within the church as a corporate body, we must continue to consistently apply the distinction between the collective church and the Christian individual as presented in scripture.

## 1. Individual fellowship

Examine the following passages and note that these instructions are given to Christian individuals, not the corporate church:

*Romans 12:10-18 Be kindly affectionate to **one another** with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to **one another**; <sup>11</sup> not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; <sup>13</sup> distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Be of the same mind toward **one another**. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. <sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

*Hebrews 13:1-16 Let brotherly love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.... <sup>16</sup> But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

In Romans 12:13 and Hebrews 13:16, the words "distributing" and "share" translate the words "KOINONEO" and "KOINONIA" respectively. Remarkably, in every case where scripture describes carnal fellowship, other than the benevolence of needy saints and wages provided for gospel preachers, it pertains to individual Christians, not the corporate church.

## 2. Church fellowship

Now examine the following passages and note that these pertain to the church as a corporate body.

*Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

*1 Corinthians 1:9, 10 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>10</sup> Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

*2 Corinthians 8:4 ...implores us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

*Ephesians 3:9, 10 ..and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; <sup>10</sup> to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,*

*Philippians 1:5 ...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,...*

Equally remarkable, in every case where scripture describes fellowship within the church as a collective body, it pertains exclusively to the work of the church as we have outlined: teaching the gospel, assembled worship, and the benevolence of needy saints. Carnal, secular fellowship is never indicated within the corporate church.

### **3. Fellowship of both**

Some of what God has ordained for the church He also authorizes for the individual Christian, such as teaching the gospel. We therefore see in scripture the fellowship of individual Christians in spiritual things as well.

*Galatians 2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*

The sound Bible student is reminded that simply because individual Christians have fellowship in both religious and secular things, it does not necessarily infer that the church as a corporate body also has fellowship in both things as well. Such reasoning would be unsound.

## **D. Social And Recreational Activity**

The most apparent product of carnal mindedness in the Lord's church today is the notion that social gatherings for the purpose of common meals and recreation are God-ordained functions of the church. There are bodies of the Lord's church today where the elders and deacons expend their efforts on planning such social gatherings as part of their management and service to the church. Moreover, the Lord's treasury is also often utilized to pay for and provide the food and the venue for these gatherings.

### **1. Necessary meals**

A point of clarification is needed. There are cases where the provision of food and the place to eat a common meal is authorized by the church, other than for the benevolence of needy saints. This is when the eating is coincidental to gathering for the purpose of doing the work of the church. The human body can only go so long without food, so if the task is time-consuming, the church has a right to act in this regard. For example, if the elders have gathered for Bible study and are many hours together at the office in a church-owned meeting house, they have the authority to pause and eat a sandwich at their conference table. They do not need to remove themselves from the church property to eat this meal. If a group has gathered together for a large physical maintenance or construction project on the meeting house, they likewise have the authority to take the necessary nourishment right there and then.

A similar circumstance of principle appears in scripture. In Matthew 14, Mark 6, and Luke 9, it is recorded that when Jesus hears of the death of John The Baptizer, He removes himself to a secluded place, but the multitude follows Him there. Here, in this impromptu gathering, Jesus teaches them. As the day grows late, the people desperately need food. Instead of sending them away for food, which would bring His teaching to an end, He feeds them there with a miracle.

Someone might ask how much time in the Lord's work is enough time to validate a church dinner, who will determine the time limit, and on what basis will it be set? These questions are beside the point, which is all about the purpose of our gathering together as a church in the first place. When we plan worship assemblies to coordinate with dinner socials and invite guests, drawing them in with the prospect of food and good times,

our problem is with carnality, not with determining how to establish some contrived time limit. Remember that EKKLESIA is a calling out and summoning together for a purpose. If the purpose is not the Lord's, it is not the Lord's summoning, and it is therefore not the Lord's gathering. The multitude in Matthew 14 does not come together for the express purpose of taking a social meal together; else, they each might have brought their potluck contribution. Instead, they gather to hear Jesus teach; the eating is coincidental. If we will start being more spiritually minded, these issues naturally go away. More will be discussed regarding matters of coincidence in later sections.

## 2. Social and recreational church meals

The necessary, coincidental meals previously discussed are altogether different from the so-called church dinner socials conducted today by mainstream churches of Christ, which are typically extensively planned events for the very purpose of socializing. If such activity is within the realm of the ordained work of the church, we should see in scripture an indication for it, either by a recorded command issued to the church, an approved example within the body, or a necessarily inferred expediency to a work of the church. To the contrary, there appears a clear admonition against it. When the Corinthian church apparently perverts the Lord's Supper into a common meal, Paul tells them to eat that kind of meal at home. The point is that the church is to be concerned with spiritual things, not carnal:

*1 Corinthians 11:18-34 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. <sup>19</sup> For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. <sup>20</sup> Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. <sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." <sup>25</sup> In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. <sup>27</sup> Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. <sup>30</sup> For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. <sup>31</sup> For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. <sup>33</sup> Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. <sup>34</sup> But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

Notwithstanding, many in the Lord's church today claiming "enlightenment" are attempting to declare authority for church-sponsored social and recreational dinners from this text. We will now examine some of their arguments.

### a. Argument for church dinner socials: "only wait for one another"

Proponents of social meals in the church today argue that Paul is not condemning social church meals but only condemning not waiting for one another when doing so. To make their point, portions of the text are highlighted as follows:

*<sup>18</sup> For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. <sup>19</sup> For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.... <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.... <sup>33</sup> Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.*

This line of reasoning resides in citing the problem as stated in verse 21 alone: that some are eating all the food ahead of the others who are left with nothing. Then, the solution is presented from verse 33 alone: that when you eat, you should wait for one another. Everything else in the immediate and greater context is conveniently disregarded.

This proposition does not fully state the real problem, which is carnality (the source of the factions among them, 1 Corinthians 3:3) and their abandonment of the Lord's Supper (verse 20). The full picture of what they are actually doing is probably not presented here, but whatever it is, it is not the supper that is the

Lord's; they are substituting their **own supper** (verse 21). We do know that some are eating their fill to the point that others are left with nothing to eat. Assuming it is still just unleavened bread and grape juice (Matthew 26:26-29), why would they gorge themselves on this humble fare? One reason is because they bring their hunger with them to church, which Paul mentions twice. Now for the Lord's Supper, each participant only needs a morsel of bread (John 13:26, 27) and a share of his own juice in a cup (Luke 22:17). This is not so much food that anyone should be filled or that it should become short in supply. However, considering their carnal mindset, they are evidently taking the occasion to have a hearty breakfast, greedily fulfilling the needs of the flesh while humiliating those who get nothing. This is not what Jesus intends for the Lord's Supper, which Paul fully rehearses in verses 23 through 29.

This proposition also disregards the complete solution to the problem which Paul continues to explain in verse 34. A bit of conundrum is seen in verses 33 and 34, as Paul effectively orders them to come together as a church to eat but also orders them to stay home to eat. The resolution of the apparent contradiction is explained by the different kinds of eating in verses 20 and 21, whether spiritual or physical. Come together as a church indeed to partake of the Lord's Supper, but for the needs of the flesh, eat your own meals at home (verse 22 and 34).

The church-meal defenders propose that when Paul says "if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home," he means "if anyone cannot wait, let him eat at home." A common tactic of false teachers is to change word meanings. This is unconscionable word wrangling.

Why would Paul order them in verse 33 to "wait for one another" if it were not an ordinary food-and-drink meal to satisfy hunger? The word "wait" translates EKDECHOMAI {ek-dekh'-om-ahee}, meaning, "1) to receive, accept 2) to look for, expect, wait for, await" (JHT), which includes that we anticipate that some might be arriving later and make accommodations for them (1 Corinthians 16:11). We can postulate some ideas about this, but there is certainly nothing in the language here that necessarily infers the eating must be a carnal meal for satisfying hunger.

Incidentally, in the New Testament, fasting sometimes accompanies prayer and important decision-making when attention to the work of the Lord is evidently deemed even more important than eating (Acts 13:3; 14:23). To this point, when we meet together as a church, it seems that we ought to feel so overwhelmed by our spiritual purpose that we can set aside the carnal desire for food at least for the relatively brief time appointed for worship.

The church-meal defenders cannot cite a command, approved example, or necessary inference for the full-course dinners they take as a church function. Nothing like roast beef or bean casserole is mentioned here. If they would derive their authority from this text to do what the Corinthians are doing so long as they wait for one another, unleavened bread and grape juice is all that is specified on the menu. However, this is not what they want to do. Motivated by Corinthian carnal-mindedness, they distort the scriptures in order to fabricate a doctrine to their desires.

#### **b. Argument for church dinner socials: "only do not practice gluttony"**

Some fellowship meal defenders claim that Paul is here only admonishing them against gluttony. However, if he had meant to tell them simply not to over-eat in what is supposedly an ordinary meal, that's what he would have said. Instead, he instructs them to eat their common meals at home.

#### **c. Argument for church dinner socials: "only do not pervert the Lord's Supper"**

Some proponents of social meals in the church today also argue that Paul is not condemning social church meals but only condemning perversion of the Lord's Supper. If this were true, Paul should have addressed the matter differently. This would have been the perfect occasion for Paul to have instructed them to eat the Lord's Supper in their worship but eat their common meals in their "fellowship hall." However, this he does not do but gives the instruction to eat their own meals at home.

#### **d. Argument for church dinner socials: "they are the love feasts cited by Jude"**

Proponents of social meals in the church today look also to the love feasts mentioned in Jude 1:12 for their authority. Jude writes:

*Jude 1:11-13 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. <sup>12</sup> These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; <sup>13</sup> raging*

*waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*

Similar language appears in 2 Peter 2:12-17. Jude's phrase, "love feasts," translates the plural of AGAPE {ag-ah'-pay}, which in this form means, "love feasts, fellowship meals, meals in which members of a Christian community eat together in fellowship" (JHT). The fact that Christians regularly share common meals together is not disputed; this is clearly presented in scripture (Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 2:12). It is also not disputed that the brethren might call these occasions "AGAPAE." However, there is absolutely no indication that this is the action of the church as a body assembled in worship nor that it has anything to do with the Lord's Supper. Any such conclusion is derived solely from conjecture.

Jude's language is intensively figurative, so it is also reasonable that he is not talking about a feast with literal food but filling ourselves with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8), and the pure milk of the word (1 Peter 2:2) – gorging ourselves on the love of God (Ephesians 3:19) – and the evil deceivers are a hindrance to it. With so much emphasis on spiritual food in scripture (John 4:32-34; 6:27-63; 1 Corinthians 10:3; Hebrews 5:12-14; 13:10; Revelation 2:7, 17), it seems unlikely for Jude to be concerned that their dinnertime is spoiled.

### **3. Bible examples of social meals**

The following scriptural example is cited by some as authority for dinner socials in the church, claiming that the fellowship here refers to the social or secular kind:

*Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

There is nothing in this passage that necessarily infers social or recreational activity. The teaching and prayer are clearly spiritual elements, so based on principles already established regarding carnality, sound reasoning accepts that the breaking of bread and fellowship are also spiritual elements: the Lord's Supper and other assembled worship forms, not a carnal meal. This harmonizes the greater context, which indicates that they had common meals in their homes, not in church assemblies:

*Acts 2:46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.*

In another case we see the church at Troas breaking bread together.

*Acts 20:6-11 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. <sup>7</sup> Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. <sup>8</sup> There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. <sup>9</sup> And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. <sup>10</sup> But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." <sup>11</sup> Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.*

The claim is made from verse 11 that, since they ate together in a church assembly, we have authority for church dinner socials. We need to recognize the true purpose for the assembly, mentioned in verse 7. Nothing in this text necessarily infers that the purpose of the gathering and the breaking of bread are for socializing. Assuming by possible inference that this is a planned social meal presents some problems in harmonizing scripture. Acts 2 says the brethren shared common meals in their houses, and Paul rebukes the Corinthians twice, ordering them to eat their common meals at home.

There are two other possibilities which do not violate these spiritual principles. First, this could be an incidental meal arising by necessity from a gathering of many hours, as discussed earlier. Another possibility is that the breaking of bread in verse 11 is simply the Lord's Supper, for which they had gathered in the first place. Either way, this is not necessarily an example of a recreational dinner social such as we see in some churches today.

### **4. A supposed expediency for evangelism**

If a church has their focus not on teaching the gospel but on "winning commitments to Christ" (according to the English definition of "evangelism" discussed previously), they will begin thinking that any means or

methods that get people baptized are expediencies for gospel teaching. This gives rise to the doctrine of the "social gospel:" the idea that food, sports, and entertainment are evangelism tools. However, food is not an expediency for teaching, because more than teaching is being accomplished. Expediencies do not add anything to the essential action executed. When Jesus feeds the 5000, it is not an expediency to His teaching, but it is something else in addition to it. Besides, remember that the work of the church as described in scripture is not centered upon winning souls to Christ but on preaching the gospel. Certainly, a church ought to be interested in making converts, but scripture reveals that the only way to do this is by teaching the gospel (Romans 10:13-17).

*1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...*

Even in churches which deny that social and recreational meals are works of the church, there is occasionally a general carnal-mindedness that creeps in. Although the church does not pay for the food or the facility, if we accommodatively call our gathering a "church potluck," we unwittingly give a carnal-minded impression to others.

*Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

*Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.*

We sometimes hear folks talk about church parties, church picnics, church weddings, church outings, and such like. If we use the word "church" as an adjective while describing things that have actually nothing to do with the church or its work, it is a clear sign of carnal mindedness. These things are fundamentally not church functions, and we ought not label them as such.

Unfortunately, many people seek a local church to join on the basis of the good social and family service programs they offer. They are looking for good ball teams for their children, well managed bowling leagues, entertaining theatrics and drama, book clubs, day care, knitting groups, quilting classes, or business contacts. Instead, when considering a local congregation, we should be investigating whether the body is standing for truth, refuting false doctrine, spreading the gospel, serving the saints, and following wise elders sound in faith. God's intention is that the gospel should be enough to draw men into the church (John 12:32, 33; Romans 1:16), not food, fun, and games (John 6:26).

*1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. <sup>2</sup> For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

*2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

Undeniably, gatherings for social and recreational activity can certainly create opportunities for gospel teaching. However, when Jesus feeds the 5000 or washes the disciples' feet, He does so on an individual basis; it is not a corporate church function. If an individual or a group wants to have a cook-out and volleyball party and then teach those gathered there for that purpose, they have every right to do so, but we ought not think the food and games have anything to do with teaching or that they are part of the church's work.

Consider also that if a persistently disorderly, impenitent Christian gathers with us to worship, he is exactly where he needs to be in order to hear an admonition that could lead him to repentance. However, if a common meal is part of the work of the church and we are not to eat such with a persistently disorderly, impenitent Christian (1 Corinthians 5:11), then when it is time for the church dinner, we must escort him out and deny him from partaking. This unreasonable circumstance is created by the unauthorized admixture of carnality to the spiritual work of the church in the first place. Get rid of the carnal church practices, and this problem disappears. Unfortunately, a church already not holding sound doctrine on church dinner socials will likely also not hold sound doctrine on withdrawing from the disorderly, and their lawlessness multiplies.



## 5. Conclusions about social church dinners

If we look to the totality of rightly applied scripture for support of social church dinners, we find nothing. To the contrary, we see that Christians individually shared common meals in their homes and that the church is not carnal but spiritual. Men have for decades tried to find in Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 11, and Jude 12 justification for church-sponsored social dinners, but it's just not there. Such carnality is wrong-mindedness, and it is disgraceful to propose a similar perversion of which the Corinthians were guilty. Consider now what attributes and inevitable consequences are associated with this carnal-mindedness.

### a. Self-assurance

Pride, arrogance, and conceit characterizes the carnal-minded Corinthians. They hold the opinion that they are altogether spiritually strong and filled with knowledge and wisdom beyond others, but they are not (reference Revelation 3:17). Paul chastises them with biting irony.

*1 Corinthians 4:8-10 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us – and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!<sup>9</sup> For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.<sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!*

*1 Corinthians 5:2 ...you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned...*

*1 Corinthians 8:2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*

Some gospel preachers that in the past have denounced social and recreational functions in the church are now defending it. Claiming that their former convictions are based in rote traditionalism, they think they now know better than all before them, and they pity those they deem to be still blinded by ignorance. However, upon examination, their defense is herein shown to be construed in unsound reasoning.

*1 Timothy 1:5-7 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,<sup>6</sup> from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,<sup>7</sup> desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*

### b. Compromise

Taking a stand for sound doctrine is uncomfortable, and those that do are often persecuted. To avoid confrontation, some will distort the truth to make it more acceptable. This has the false appearance of working for unity, but it is actually compromise, the error of Balaam, who devised a plan whereby he thought he could obey God and please Balak for a reward at the same time (Numbers 21 - 23, 31; 2 Peter 2:15; Revelation 2:14).

*1 Timothy 6:20, 21 ...Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge –<sup>21</sup> by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.*

### c. Misleading influences

The social and recreational functions adopted in some churches have an appeal to the flesh, and those who are weak in the faith are thereby unwittingly lead into lawlessness. These churches grow very large in membership and monetarily, and the growth is perceived as evidence of God's blessing.

*Romans 16:17-18 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.<sup>18</sup> For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*

*2 Peter 2:1, 2 ...There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies ...<sup>2</sup> And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

#### **d. Apostasy**

One thing leads to another. If sound doctrine is not maintained on social church dinners, it is inevitable that sound reasoning will be abandoned on any other doctrinal issue until a church will not defend immutable truth on anything.

*1 Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?*

*2 Timothy 3:13, 14 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. <sup>14</sup> But you must continue in the things which you have learned...*

#### **e. Judgment of condemnation**

Refer again to the keynote scripture of this section.

*1 Corinthians 11:30-32 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. <sup>31</sup> For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

We must be attentive to the seriousness of this perversion. To act without divine authority is rebellion, and "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23).

*2 Peter 2:1-3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.*

*2 Peter 2:9, 10 ...The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, <sup>10</sup> and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed.*

*2 Peter 2:17-19 These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. <sup>18</sup> For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup> While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption.*

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Carnal Influences In The Church

1. During the time of Christ and the early church, who were the Sadducees, and what were their significant beliefs contrary to doctrine of Christ?
2. How are Sadducean beliefs manifested in religion today?
3. Review the scriptures that describe carnal mindedness. Make a list of the things mentioned as being the causes and results of carnal mindedness.
4. Explain in your own words the meaning of fellowship as used in scripture.
5. In what realms do the scriptures indicate fellowship within the church?
6. In Acts 2:42, the early church is said to be continually devoted to the apostle's fellowship. In what would have been this fellowship?
7. Has God ordained the church to be involved in recreational, social, or entertainment activities?
8. In 1 Corinthians 11, where does Paul instruct those Christians to eat their common meals for satisfying physical hunger?
9. Is taking a common meal together in a church activity ever lawful? If so, when?
10. Is sharing a common meal together an expediency for gospel teaching? If not, why – what is added, lost, or changed?

## **IX. Things That Are Not The Work Of The Church**

Not every activity with a religious or moral implication is necessarily a work of the church. For example, we are religiously and morally obligated to bridle our tongues and "visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (James 1:26, 27), but these are not acts ordained for the church as a body. This principle will relate to several activities that will be examined in this section.

We will be challenging the authority of several common practices in churches today. However, as noted earlier, the obligation to provide proof of authority for a certain action in the church rests upon those who would choose to perform it. It is not the duty of others to prove that the action is unauthorized. Nevertheless, the arguments presented by those who attempt to defend these practices will likewise be challenged.

*1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.*

The word "test" in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 is from DOKIMAZO {dok-im-ad'-zo} meaning, "1) to test, examine, prove, scrutinise (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals 2) to recognise as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy" (JHT). We will now put these practices to the test.

### **A. Fund-raising Activities**

Intuitively, if a church has more financial resources, it can do more evangelism. Thinking the ends justifies the means, human reasoning takes for granted that any endeavor of the church that will generate revenue should be authorized as an expediency for evangelism, if the money is used for a greater teaching work. The result is church-sponsored bake sales, car washes, and other such activities. These things are not expediences for teaching. Baking a cake has absolutely nothing to do with teaching the gospel.

Fundamentally, making money is not an expediency for teaching the gospel, because something more is added: commerce. Similarly, remember that missionary societies are not teaching expediences, because something more is added: an organization. Where God has specified the organization, we have no right to establish a substitute for it. Likewise, where God has specified the method of raising revenue in the church, we have no right to devise a substitute for it. To do so would be to act outside the bounds of scripture (2 John 9).

The reason for our first-day-of-the-week, free-will collection is because that is what God has specified (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). It is not to fulfill a generic command to raise money. Such a command has not yet been found in scripture, but if it were, we then could expedite the raising of money with church bake sales, rummage sales, printing services, parking services, or any other means or methods of generating income. Until such a scripture is found, we dare not consider such carnal activities to be the work of the church.

### **B. General Deeds Of Kindness**

Earlier in our study, we noted that edification, in its generic sense, is nowhere actually identified in scripture as a work of the church as a collective body. The work of the church is to teach the gospel, specifically; edification is a natural result of this. Edification is the end, not the means.

Since edification can generally include every kind of good deed we might do for others, the consequence of considering edification to be a categorical work of the church is that all kinds of carnal, secular, and social programs are creeping into the church. Examples of good works include visiting the sick and elderly and sending thank-you, birthday, and get-well cards, flowers, and fruit baskets. It is also good to help the elderly with household chores: cutting grass, trimming bushes, raking leaves, shoveling snow, and every other such thing.

Some gospel preachers think that part of the work God has ordained for evangelists is to visit the sick and shut-ins. This writer knows some preachers who dedicate a certain weekday exclusively to these tasks. Though preachers may have more convenient opportunities for such work because of freedom to schedule their work week, they ought not think that such activity is a purpose for which the church provides their wages. Evangelists are good news tellers. Visitation is not any more the work of a church-supported evangelist than it is any other individual Christian.

It perhaps seems strange to consider that the work of the church as a body is not the general doing of good for brethren, but God has clearly laid this duty squarely upon individuals. Our careful examination of scripture indicates that the benevolent work of the church as a body is toward brethren with real needs. Shoveling snow is a nice gesture, but when elderly folks can pay for these services, it is clearly not a true need and hence not a work of the church. Even if they cannot pay, scripture indicates that the duty to assist falls first to family, not the church. Moreover, if people are living above their means, it ought not be the church's responsibility to pick up their slack. It is reasonable for people to change their lifestyle instead of expecting the church to arrange for or pay for services they can't otherwise afford.

However, because individuals sometimes do not rise to the task God has appointed them, the eldership often then assumes that in order to get individuals to do this work, they must expend their efforts planning how they can organize it, and they delegate leadership tasks to the deacons who distribute social visitation assignments to church-group members. It is then no longer individual action but action of the corporate church under the management of the church leadership. This is not the work of elders and deacons.

To the contrary, the work of the church is to teach individuals that they ought to be busy doing these kindly deeds; it is part of the gospel message. If brethren then do not step up to their responsibility, the church needs to recognize this as outright ungodliness. Paul calls such people worse than infidels who neglect their families. If the instruction fails to motivate brethren to their individual duty, then marking them and withdrawing with further admonishing is what the Holy Spirit reveals the church should do, not organizing social work groups. Too many churches today have too many work groups active in all kinds of carnal and social busy-work that God has not authorized for the church.

*1 Timothy 5:8-16 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever...<sup>16</sup> If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.*

*2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us...<sup>14</sup> And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed...*

*1 John 3:17-19 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?<sup>18</sup> My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.<sup>19</sup> And by this we know that we are of the truth...*

Bear in mind that there is nothing inherently wrong with forming work groups for general edification, just not by the church. Individuals can work collectively and institute any organization or association they wish to manage visitation and edification efforts and to raise funds for flowers, gifts, or any other carnal or social thing. Please review the principles previously established concerning lawful man-made general benevolent societies. Note that likewise forming such an edifying organization does not supplant the church, because God has not ordained it or any other divine organization for this purpose. We are therefore free to form such a corporation, but we ought not call it a "church group." Moreover, elders and deacons have no business directing these efforts as part of their service to the church as a body nor using the church treasury to support these efforts. These things are not ordained works of the church.

### **C. Healthcare And Secular Education**

Mainstream denominationalism has perhaps made no greater impression upon twenty-first century North American culture than in the financial support of hospitals, health clinics, and colleges. For example, nearly every hospital bears the name of the religious denomination who is its primary sponsor. Hospitals are truly wonderful institutions doing a tremendous service. However, no amount of good that a hospital might do can justify a church supporting it. Authority for such must be derived from a direct command, approved example, or necessary inference in scripture. An attempt to validate such action might come from reasoning that James 5:14 presents the authority for it:

*James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

James 5:14 describes the action of individuals, not a collective body. The elders are not the corporate church nor do they represent the church. James explains in the next verse that the prayer, not of a corporate body, but of a righteous **man** (an elder, for instance) can accomplish much. The instruction for individual elders to

offer prayer and apply therapeutic ointment does not logically infer authority for the church as a corporate body to establish or financially support a healthcare organization.

Some churches provide primary and secondary secular education. Complete programs are arranged with staffing and facilities for instruction in mathematics, science, and social studies. To the contrary, founding or financially supporting schools is work that falls upon individuals or human organizations. The church has no authority for such involvement in carnal matters but in spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

Some churches today are developing dieting and physical exercise programs in the church based upon the diet of Daniel and his friends as they prepare for work in the Babylonian king's service (Daniel 1:12-16). Good nutrition and weight management are certainly worthy pursuits, as our bodies are temples of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19), but scripture nowhere indicates that the work of the church in these matters should include anything other than teaching individuals to honor God in their bodies. Exercise equipment, weight scales, and whole grain muffin recipes are not expediences to this end. Paul acknowledges that bodily exercise does have some benefit, but godliness is more important.

*1 Timothy 4:6-8 If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. <sup>7</sup> But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. <sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*

We must not assume that what God prescribes to us as individuals He also ordains as functions in the church as a corporate body. God's word certainly gives us what we need for fulfillment in every aspect of life, in both carnal and spiritual matters, but God has not ordained the church to function in all these areas. The work of the church is fundamentally spiritual, not carnal (John 8:36).

#### **D. Social And Political Activism**

God has ordained the church to teach the gospel. Part of the gospel message is morality. The church is commissioned to teach individuals that their bodies and minds are to be instruments of the Lord; we are not to be engaged in abortion, pornography, homosexuality, or bigotry. However, anything beyond teaching against these practices is not the work of the church. The church as a corporate body has no business organizing or in any way participating in anti-abortion demonstrations, lobbying with the government against pornography, or fighting for civil rights. As worthy as these causes are, they are political and social issues. Even though there are religious implications, God has not appointed His church as a body to be involved in these things. If God had intended that it should, we would see in scripture a command, example, or necessary inference to authorize it.

It may seem strange that the church be not involved in social and civic reform, but it is God's intention that people voluntarily do the right thing for the love of the truth when they hear the gospel rather than do it because of a government mandate. God has ordained that the church teach the gospel and let people decide on their own to accept or reject it.

*1 Corinthians 14:37, 38 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

*Romans 6:17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*

*2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup> And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, <sup>12</sup> that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

*Revelation 22:11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.*

This is not to say that it is wrong for individuals to work for legal reform and civil justice or to establish human institutions to those ends; it is just not a work God has ordained for the corporate church.

## **E. Weddings**

One of the most prevalent manifestations of carnal influence in the church today is the abuse of church property for wedding ceremonies, even among churches otherwise renouncing institutionalism and the social gospel doctrine. Let's investigate from scripture whether church weddings are indeed aligned with the ordained work of the church. If a church wedding is authorized, we should be able to produce from scripture a command, an approved example, or a necessary inference for it. To begin, let's study weddings and marriage as revealed in scripture.

### **1. Difference between weddings and marriages**

It is essential that we note the practical difference between a marriage and a wedding; they are not the same thing. Marriage is the institutional relationship; a wedding is the ceremony by which a couple enters that relationship. In other words, marriage is the covenant (Malachi 2:14); a wedding is the ratification of the covenant. The wedding endures but for a short time and is concluded (John 2:1, 2), but the marriage endures for the life of the couple (Romans 7:2).

The New Testament Greek language does not utilize different words to make such a distinction. The verb GAMEO {gam-eh'-o} and the noun GAMOS {gam'-os} both have dual meanings: the continued action and state of being married (1 Corinthians 7:10) and the ceremonial actions and festivities of getting married (Matthew 22:1-12). Friberg indicates the word is also used by metonymy to indicate a wedding hall (Matthew 10:22, NAU). The context, noun case, or verb tense will indicate the difference. Modern English translators reflect the distinction for us. Compare John 2:2 and Hebrews 13:4 in either the NAU or NKJ. Both use the word GAMOS, but in a different sense.

Consider that Adam and Eve were married, but they had no wedding. Their union was appointed by God; they were created that way. However, all couples after them enter into marriage by somehow ratifying their covenant by a public demonstration of their intent.

The very first case in scripture is of Cain. The record simply states that "Cain knew his wife," which is understood to mean sexual intimacy, as she thereby conceived (Genesis 4:17). Nothing is specifically revealed about Cain's wedding, but wives do not automatically happen. By necessity, if he had a wife, he must have somehow ratified that covenant as God had ordained (Genesis 2:24). The most effective way to ratify a marriage covenant is with an exchange of vows before witnesses, which removes all doubt concerning the couple's intentions (Numbers 30:6). Of Lamech, the record states that he "took for himself two wives." The word "took" is from LAQACH {law-kakh'}; the Hebrew verb stem is Qal, which expresses action in the active voice. Whatever action whereby he made the public aware that these women became bound to him in marriage was, by definition, a wedding, crude as it may have been. Such basic, civil confirmation is all that is actually required to ratify a marriage.

The Law of Moses contains many regulations concerning the treatment of wives and the responsibilities of husbands, but nothing is specified concerning the procedures of wedding celebrations or festivals. Regarding the taking and being given in marriage, neither Moses' law nor the law of Christ supersedes nor augments the ordinance of Genesis 2:24, to which Jesus makes reference in Matthew 19:4, 5.

Conclusively, the marriage covenant originates from God and so its ratification. However the ceremonial trappings, festivities, and celebrations of weddings originate from human customs and traditions, not from God. Such festivities and celebrations are not necessary, and they are not actually part of the covenant ratification but an accompaniment to it.

### **2. A search for authority from command or example**

Now let's begin our search in scripture for a church wedding. A command for it is fairly easy to rule out. Nowhere in scripture is the church as a body instructed to conduct a wedding the way we are instructed to relieve needy saints, teach the gospel, take the Lord's Supper, pray, lay by in store, or sing spiritual songs.

Examples of weddings in scripture vary greatly from simple statements of intent to elaborate festivals. Over the years and relative to culture, examples in scripture become more extravagant. One of Solomon's weddings is characterized by a parade of his entourage as he is carried upon a highly ornate cedar couch infused with fragrances, wearing a crown (Song 3:6-11). In the New Testament, wedding customs include wedding parties (Matthew 9:15), private invitations (Matthew 22:3), feasts (22:4), special attire (22:11), oil lamps (25:1), guests of honor (Luke 14:8), and banqueting (John 2:2, 3). In the church era, the church is not mentioned once in scripture as being involved in weddings.

By customs of today, wedding celebrations have become even more elaborate. Typical ceremonies include floral arrangements, candlelight, pageantry, dancing, orchestra music, and limousine service. However, some couples today also utilize costumes and role playing, or they include their hobbies in their weddings, such as scuba diving, sky diving, or bungee jumping. As long as these activities are not inherently sinful, all such things have a legitimate place in a wedding, if the involved parties are so inclined. However, if any one of these, such as pageantry, is accepted in a church wedding, by the same logic, all must be. Notwithstanding, these things have nothing to do with the church nor even with ratifying the marriage covenant; they are festival trappings.

### **3. Arguments from expediency and inference**

Without a command or example of a church wedding recorded in scripture, proponents claim that church weddings are authorized based on the following reasons:

- It is an expediency for teaching the gospel.
- It is necessarily inferred by that fact that marriage is ordained by God.
- There is nothing holy about a church building, so it is okay to use it for weddings.
- Jesus went to weddings.
- Churches have hosted weddings for years.
- It is only a matter of opinion.

Let's examine these claims.

#### **a. Argument of expediency**

We submit again that an expediency is only a convenient aid, tool, or method for executing a particular action. An expediency does not add to, subtract from, or in any way change the action. For example, if we sing hymns using a song book, we are still doing nothing more and nothing less than singing hymns. A songbook is only an aid. However, if we add instrumental music accompaniment, we are now doing more: singing and playing an instrument. The instrument is not an aid; it is the introduction of some additional action. We could site several other examples, but similarly, a wedding ceremony is not an expediency for teaching, because something more is added (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6).

Proponents will argue that if Bible teaching is part of a wedding ceremony, the wedding ceremony is also an authorized work of the church. The apparent argument is that if any act of worship is added to any other activity, that other activity itself becomes an authorized work of the church. This completely defies sound reasoning. Consider that prayer is offered at stock car races. Someone following this reasoning would have to accept that if prayer, an act of worship, is accomplished at a stock car race, the stock car race is also authorized as a work of the church. If simply adding gospel teaching to a wedding causes it to become a work of the church, it should do the same for graduation ceremonies, baby showers, anniversary celebrations, birthday parties, and so on without limit. If anyone accepts church weddings on this basis, he must also accept everything else that would be likewise derived. He cannot arbitrarily pick where it does or does not apply on personal judgment.

#### **b. Argument of things ordained by God**

This argument is based on the assumption that anything ordained by God has a place in the church. Clearly, if the marriage covenant is ordained by God, then so is its ratification: the wedding. However, the sound Bible student recognizes that God ordains certain things for certain individuals and certain other things for the church as a body. The distinction between the individual and the corporate church applies again. Simply because God ordains a thing does not necessarily infer that He ordains it for the church. For example, God ordains capital punishment (Romans 13:2-5), but there is no indication that He ordains this as a work of the church. The church has no authority to build a gallows for the execution of criminals. God also ordains that a man is to perform honest work for a living (Genesis 3:19; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11), but this does not authorize retirement parties as a work of the church. One who holds to this reasoning for a church wedding must also accept that the church can sponsor any political convention and rally, provide the service of income tax return preparation, or provide a venue for polling, since civil government is ordained by God (Romans 13:1, 6, 7). This reasoning is absurd. Besides, please remember that there is a difference between marriages and wedding festivals. God has indeed ordained marriage and its ratification, but wedding celebrations and festivals are the invention of man, not God.



### **c. Argument of the non-holy church building**

Regarding the significance of sacred things, please review our earlier conclusions on this when we examined the abuse of church funds. The fact of the matter is that the church building is indeed holy, not in the sense of worship-worthiness but of belonging to the Lord and being set apart for His exclusive purposes (Ezra 8:28).

Incidentally, remember also that the entire church collectively participates in the sin when the Lord's property is abused. Therefore, those among them with the conviction that church weddings are unauthorized ought not deceive themselves into thinking they can simply choose to not attend and thereby not partake in the lawlessness.

### **d. Argument of Jesus going to weddings**

The distinction between individual action and corporate action of the church as a body needs to be considered here again. The simple fact that Jesus went to a wedding (John 2:1-3) and did many other things does not mean He has ordained them for His church. For example, He apparently worked for decades as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), but this does not authorize carpentry as a work of the church.

### **e. Argument of traditions and opinions**

The most fundamental investigation of authority in religion will establish that the traditions and judgments of men are not our standard of authority. Moreover, when a false teacher is debating an issue for which he cannot produce scriptural authority, a common tactic often used is for him to declare that it is too complicated to fully understand and is therefore a matter of opinions (1 Timothy 6:3, 4; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; 2 Peter 3:16). However, this examination has been clear, logical, and decisive. Furthermore, it is not left to a man to arbitrarily dictate to others what is and is not an issue of opinions.

### **f. The logical conclusion**

Consider that a church can regularly meet for worship in a facility either rented or owned by the church. Therefore, if church weddings are authorized, the church ought to have the authority not only to offer its church-owned facility for the event but also offer to pay for any other rented facility. Remember: church property and church treasury are equivalent. Furthermore, if a church has the authority to provide the venue for a wedding, it should also have the authority to provide the flowers, the music, the photographer, and everything else. The logic of this argumentation ends in absurdity; it reduces the glorious church to little more than a social services provider.

## **4. The origin of church weddings**

Church weddings did not originate in the mind of God but in the mind of men. Had it been from God, we would see it revealed in scripture. Everything we know of the mind of God we receive through scripture (1 Corinthians 2; Romans 16:25, 26). Let's examine some other sources.

According to the Roman Catholic Church Catechism (1113) marriage is declared to be a "sacrament," of which, the Catechism further states, "the sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us..." (1131). There is no scripture validating this. Marriage is sacred for certain, but the idea that it is entrusted to the church is the product of human creeds, not of divine revelation in scripture. Marriages and weddings have been going on since the dawn of creation. From the time of Adam until the days of the apostles, marriages and weddings have had no need of the church in order to be performed or in any other way managed or monitored. God Himself rules over marriages by His divine law independent of any function of the church.

In addition, the Episcopal Book Of Common Prayer prescribes in detail the things that are to be said and done at a church wedding. Those who are authorized to officiate and the exact order of events in the service are listed therein (p. 422 - p. 438), but nothing concerning these regulations are validated with scripture. These are the ordinances of men, not of God. Churches that are involved in wedding ceremonies derive their authority solely from the traditions of denominationalism, because they cannot derive it from scripture.

## **5. A social event**

All marriages have religious and moral significance. Even if the couple are atheists, they are still bound by divine law, whether or not they choose to recognize it. God does not have separate laws for the marriages of believers and for those of non-believers; all mankind is amenable to the same law of God (John 12:48; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:16).

Notwithstanding, it is completely possible to have a wedding ceremony where not the first mention of God, his law, or religion is heard. God has ordained no stipulations or regulations in the matter, but the couple are married just the same whether or not there are any religious references in the ceremony. Therefore, a wedding ceremony is not necessarily an inherently religious event.

Simply because a wedding ceremony might be void of religious references, the marriage is not thereby without moral implications. On the other hand, just because a wedding ceremony is filled with religious references, it does not thereby become a church service. Remember, not everything with a religious or moral implication is necessarily connected to a church function.

Fundamentally, a wedding is a social affair. Just because religion might be mentioned in the ceremony, that does not make it a church function. If religion is likewise mentioned when a government official is sworn to office, that also does not make it a church function.

There are notable differences between a wedding ceremony and that which would be the work of the church: a worship service. Let's list a few.

- Weddings are attended by private invitation; worship services are open to the public (1 Corinthians 14:22-25);
- Weddings have guests of honor; in worship services, all are equal without partiality (James 2:1-9);
- Weddings are centered on the bride and groom; worship services are centered on Christ (1 Corinthians 2:2);
- Weddings may have secular and instrumental music; worship services have singing of hymns (Ephesians 5:19);
- Weddings may have women speakers; worship services have men in leading public speaking roles (1 Corinthians 14:34);
- Wedding guests are invited to greet the newlywed couple; worship attendees are invited to obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14);
- Weddings have food and entertainment; worship services have a reverent, spiritual objective (1 Peter 2:5).

We can stop there. This is enough to demonstrate that weddings and church services are distinct. One has no connection to the other.

All of this is not to say that wedding celebrations with all their pageantry and festivities are sinful; they simply have no more place in the church than do organized recreation and entertainment activities. God has not specified the proceedings of wedding festivals, so we can arrange these as we wish, outside the church. Had God specified wedding festivities, then we could not substitute for them. (This follows the same principles established earlier.)

## **F. Funerals**

Another common abuse of church property today is for funeral services. Let's likewise investigate from scripture whether church funeral and visitation services are indeed aligned with the ordained work of the church. If a church funeral is authorized, we should be able to produce from scripture a command, an approved example, or a necessary inference for it.

### **1. History of funerals**

The first recorded human death is of Abel, murdered by his brother. Nothing is revealed in scripture regarding any kind of memorial service for him. The sacred record for over the next several centuries simply states that individuals lived and died. It appears not to be until the death of Sarah that anything is mentioned about one mourning over another's passing. It states, "and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her" (Genesis 23:2). All verbs here are expressing the active voice. Moreover, the definition of the word for "came" includes a coming in or entering, which suggests that Abraham went to or into a certain place for the very purpose of grieving for his wife.

Concerning deceased bodies, Numbers 19 describes how those who handle a corpse become unclean and what must be done for them to become clean again. However, the Law of Moses specifies no proceedings for funerals, memorial services, or prescribed mourning periods. The law furthermore specifies nothing

concerning the disposal of dead bodies. The inspired record indicates that the bodies of those who die are buried (Genesis 23:19; Numbers 1:20; Deuteronomy 10:6; 34:6) or burned, if enemies or criminals (Joshua 7:25; 2 Kings 23:20), but this is apparently by human tradition and judgment, not by divine law.

In New Testament times, the deceased was traditionally laid out in a home for a time for visitation prior to burial. Mementos of their life might be on display (Acts 9:37-39). Women hired as professional mourners would come to the place and make loud wailings (Mark 5:35-40). The deceased was eventually placed in a coffin and carried out for burial (Luke 7:12-14).

Funeral activities have always varied greatly from culture to culture. In twenty-first century North America, there is typically a wake or visitation where folks come together, usually with the body present, to console, reminisce, and reconnect with old friends and distant family members. A funeral service follows where the life and accomplishments of the deceased are recounted and celebrated, the details of which vary greatly with particular religious beliefs. A grave-site service with concluding remarks and usually prayer often finalizes the activities. Other cultures can be quite different. Sometimes the wake is more of a festival with music and banqueting that can last for days. In some cases, a musical parade is conducted in a procession through city streets.

None of these activities come from an ordinance of God in scripture; they all apparently originate from human tradition alone.

## **2. Attempts to authorize a church funeral**

### **a. Argument from example**

An attempt to validate a church funeral might come from reasoning that Acts 8:2 presents an approved example for it:

*Acts 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

Remember that authority derived from inferences must be necessarily forced conclusions, not just possible or probable conclusions. Moreover, we must again distinguish between individual and collective action. Earlier in this study, we also noted the distinction between the coincidental cooperation of Christians and that of the church as a corporate body. Simply because some Christians are acting collectively does not necessarily mean it is a church function. Our task is to determine in Acts 8:2 whether the collective action of the devout men is action of the church as a body. As we cannot tell for certain, the inference is only possible or plausible, not necessary, and hence not authoritative. The church as a body is never seen in scripture as being unequivocally involved in any funeral.

### **b. Argument from expediency**

Those attempting to validate a church funeral will claim that it is an expedient means of gospel teaching. On the basis of what we have previously discussed about weddings and missionary societies, the reader should be already prepared to defeat this argument. Even though gospel preaching often accompanies a funeral service, that is not all that is being conducted; a eulogy and commemoration, not of Christ, but of a man is added. However, that which is merely expedient should add nothing to what is actually being accomplished (Revelation 22:18). It is foolishness to think that a certain amount of preaching, singing, and praying added to a funeral validates it as a work of the church. If so, we should be able to also conduct a church assembly in honor of a person yet living – celebrating an anniversary, birthday, retirement, any other reason – as long as we add a little preaching, singing, or praying.

Another argument offered is that some who need to hear the gospel might not otherwise hear it unless the funeral services are conducted in a church function. This is pure nonsense. Bible teaching can just as well be presented in a funeral home or any other venue or occasion outside the function of the corporate church. Similarly, though we can all agree that the church has every right to come together any time or place for gospel teaching, spiritual singing, and prayer, some will suggest that, since non-Christians might not be as likely to come to a church assembly for those reasons alone, a church funeral and memorial service is an expedient way of bringing the lost in to hear the gospel. However, the very same reasoning is rejected when our erring brethren use it to defend their social gospel practices. Besides, the gospel message should be all that is needed to draw men unto Christ (John 6:26; 12:32; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Those who come to Christ from carnal motives cannot please Him (Romans 8:5-8, 1 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). If we are truly interested in teaching the truth at a funeral, it is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate that the Lord's church is not like the denominations, who engage in all kinds of unauthorized secular practices of human origin.

We should consider also the purpose for the gathering. Remember that if the calling out, the EKKLESIA, is not for the purposes of the Lord, then it is not the Lord's calling. When people go to a funeral, they go for the express purpose of honoring a departed soul and generally edifying their survivors. Our study has demonstrated that these things are not the work God has appointed for His church as a body. The event commonly connected with a funeral within our culture called the "viewing" is often called "visitation," and this is precisely the kind of thing the Lord has appointed for individuals (James 1:26, 27), not for His church as a corporate body.

In further attempts to justify a church funeral, the claim is sometimes made that the laid-out body of the deceased in the assembly is only a teaching expediency to demonstrate the fragility of life – a mere visual aid, so to speak, such as a whiteboard, workbook, presentation program, or a glass of water that a preacher might somehow use to illustrate a point (Acts 21:11). An honest heart will recognize that the deceased body of a loved one will be viewed by attendees altogether differently than such impersonal teaching tools. This is much more than a prop; the body is honored and is presented as a memorial. Consider that in the assembly called a "viewing," the body is not the means to an end but the end in itself. Expediencies are optional and non-essential. For example, we can sing with or without songbooks, but we cannot have a "viewing" without a body. The body is therefore not an expediency.

### **c. Argument from priorities**

Some teachers proclaim that church funerals are authorized as long as gospel teaching, prayer, and spiritual singing are at the center. This is equivalent to saying that any unauthorized practice is acceptable as long as other accompanying authorized practices predominate the occasion. These same teachers who would reject this reasoning when applied in defense of church-supported human institutions and the social gospel doctrine will adopt it to defend their church funerals and weddings. Our Lord likens such admixture to leaven and identifies the duplicity as hypocrisy.

*Luke 12:1 He began to say to His disciples first of all, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."*

*1 Corinthians 5:6-7 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened....*

In reality, any attempt to execute a traditional funeral yet keep gospel teaching as the priority will inevitably fail. It is self-deception to think the deceased body in the assembly will not actually be the focal-point of the event. Once the body of the deceased is introduced, the leaven typically spreads to other carnal things, such as using the Lord's visual aid projector, not for gospel teaching, but for a photo collage as a tribute to the life, family, and accomplishments of the deceased.

A study of hermeneutics will show that we need to have divine authority for **all** that we do in our assemblies, not just the predominate things (Colossians 3:17). Correspondingly, we should remember that the church at Thyatira was faithful in most every good work, but this did not excuse them for their one shortcoming (Revelation 2:18-29).

### **d. Argument from misunderstanding incidentals**

Some brethren, even those who renounce the social gospel doctrine, will attempt to validate a church funeral by the argument that we often do many things in a church-owned meeting house that are not works of the church. For example, we might talk about football in the building after services are dismissed. This is exactly the same reasoning presented by our erring brethren who attempt to validate church-sponsored ball teams and dinner socials. The fact that we might discuss secular things after dismissal is coincidental – it is not the reason we have gathered together. A fair comparison to a funeral would be if the elders announced that we are having a special assembly to discuss football for 45 minutes and then have 15 minutes of teaching, singing, and prayer. Such church activity would be unauthorized. We will discuss incidental matters further in a later section of this study.

### **e. Argument from ambiguity and opinions**

Another argument offered in an attempt to defend church funerals is to suggest that each situation has its own characteristics and conditions and must be considered on a case-by-case basis. The heart of this argument is the presumption that the possible combinations of circumstances are so complicated that an immutable set of rules applicable to all funerals in all instances does not exist. Therefore, strict adherence to rules is not practical, and we have no basis to definitively declare that any given church funeral is forbidden. According to this reasoning, authority for church funerals is left entirely to personal discretion and judgment.

This aligns with the heresy of situational ethics. The fundamental flaw with this argument is that it has no scriptural basis but is founded on human opinions alone.

The implication is that God's word does not give us a clear answer about this. This is a serious charge against God's word. In its own defense, we should consider what the Bible says regarding true knowledge and understanding in the word (Psalm 119; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 10:3-7; Ephesians 1:17, 18; 5:17; Colossians 1:9).

*Ephesians 3:3, 4 ...He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ).*

*Colossians 2:2-4 ...That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.*

*1 Timothy 6:20, 21 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – <sup>21</sup> by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith....*

This is perhaps the most treacherous of all arguments proposed in defense of church funerals because of its logical end. Once we accept the hypothesis that church funeral services are too complex for us to declare they are unauthorized with certainty, then eventually God's laws on divorce, elder qualifications, women's roles, church-supported human institutions, instrumental worship music, and every other doctrinal matter will fall to the same reasoning, and we will not be able to hold anything as actual truth or actual error.

In reality, this is not so complicated. God's word is not that ambiguous; we know what it means to teach, sing, and pray. Besides, just because some things in scripture are hard to understand does not mean all things are, nor does it mean they cannot be understood with deeper study (2 Peter 3:16). False teachers often use the argument of case-by-case evaluation as an easy answer in matters where they are unable to defend their position with sound reasoning. Ignorance and deception are sustained by ambiguity (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

#### **f. Argument of the non-holy church building and traditions**

Regarding sacred things, please review our earlier conclusions on this when we examined the abuse of church funds and church weddings. The same reasoning applies precisely as before. This is also the point where many will say, "I don't see anything wrong with it" in a futile attempt to defend a church funeral. Furthermore, it does not matter whether church funerals have been conducted in various places for many years. If scriptural authority cannot be produced, we need to stop doing it.

### **3. A social affair**

Even though Bible preaching might be part of a funeral service, it does not have to be; God has delivered no ordinance for this. Atheists and those having no belief in life hereafter have legitimate funerals, also. Therefore, a funeral is a decidedly social event. Just because preaching might be added to a funeral does not make it any less a social event or any more a church function.

#### **a. Comparison of funerals to worship services**

We can make a list of the various ways a funeral is different from the work of the church, such as a worship service.

- Funeral attendants come to pay respect for the deceased; worship attendants come to glorify God (Revelation 14:7).
- Funeral attendants come to visit distant family and old friends; worship attendants come to draw near to God (Hebrews 10:22).
- Funerals have a eulogy where the life of a deceased man is remembered; worship has a remembrance of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25).
- Funerals often have the body of the deceased on display in memoriam; worship has the body of the Lord presented in the communion bread and fruit of the vine (1 Corinthians 10:16).
- Funeral attendants are frequently invited to meet at the gravesite; worship attendants are invited to obey the gospel (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

Funerals may very well have gospel preaching, the singing of hymns, and prayers: all attributes of worship that certainly have a place in the work of the church. However, the activities listed above are not the work of the church, and when they are added, they pollute and profane the work of the church. Remove from a funeral or visitation everything that pertains to socializing and a tribute to a deceased man, and you have nothing more than a worship service: saints coming together to find comfort in the word of God (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 10:25). Such an assembly has a rightful place in the church.

#### **b. Church funding**

Remember that church funds and church property are essentially the same thing. Therefore, if a church uses the church-owned meeting house for a funeral, then a church that rents its meeting place for worship ought to likewise have the authority to use the church-owned treasury to pay the fee for a funeral home or any other venue for the same event. If a renting church can do this, then a church that owns its meeting place can do this, too. If a church can lawfully provide the venue for a funeral, then by the same rights, it should be able also to provide embalming services, limousine services, caskets, tombstones, burial plots, and floral arrangements. These are all features of a funeral. Denominational churches are often characterized by cemeteries on the grounds of the church property. If church funerals are accepted as authorized, then it must also be lawful for the church to finance all these other things without exception. However, these things have nothing to do with the work of the church.

#### **4. The origin of church funerals**

Canon law of the Roman Catholic Church and its Catechism (section 1680) prescribes the activities of funerals in detail. However, the scriptures are completely void of any such instructions. The Book Of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church, paragraph 468, states, "The death of a member of the Church should be reported as soon as possible to, and arrangements for the funeral should be made in consultation with, the Minister of the Congregation. Baptized Christians are properly buried from the church."

No scripture is offered to validate any of these statements. The scripture has not yet been presented that indicates church involvement in any funeral. The idea of church responsibility in funerals for "baptized Christians" in particular is equally a fabrication of human conjecture. If a church can host funerals for their members, they ought to also be able to do so for any non-member. However, if a church of Christ is today involved in funeral services but only for Christians, it is all the more evidence of its man-made origin in denominationalism.

Conclusively, funeral proceedings are wholly the product of human customs, not divine appointments. This is not to say funerals are sinful; they simply have no place in the church. The idea that a funeral is a work of the church is completely founded in denominational traditions and the ordinances of human creeds. If we are truly people of the book, we need to divest ourselves from all denominational traditionalism not validated in scripture.

#### **G. Incidental Matters**

Those who defend the social gospel doctrine will claim that we do many things when we meet together for worship for which we have no scriptural basis. For example, they will argue that if we have authority to change a baby's diaper in the building, we have authority for a church wedding or dinner social. However, changing a diaper in the building is only a matter of coincidence; it is not our express purpose for gathering. When the elders invite everyone to bring their babies to the building at a designated time for a diaper changing service, then these social gospel defenders will have a parallel comparison, but they will still not have a legitimate argument. There is no authority for a diaper changing service, and one unauthorized practice offers no authority for another.

The social gospel defenders will similarly claim that if the church allows neighborhood children to sometimes ride their skateboards in the church's vacant parking lot during non-assembly hours, then the church can also provide some skateboard ramps or swing sets. However, the fact that the elders might not come and chase the children away or call the police does not mean that they condone or encourage this activity. This is a matter of coincidence. The elders have no control against all such abuses, but if there are doubts about their responsibility, they can always post a sign stating, "church parking only." Consider the purpose of the parking lot in the first place. It is an expediency for assembling. A study of authority in religion will establish that the use justifies the tool; the tool does not justify the use. For example, the need to copy teaching materials authorizes a copy machine. The copy machine does not authorize printing cupcake recipes. The same is true in similitude for the parking lot.

Our purpose for assembling together as a church is to do the Lord's work and to worship. We should not make it our definitive purpose as a church to come together to do anything other than what God has ordained the church to do. Other activities arise as an incidental result of people coming together in one place. However, we cannot necessarily conclude that those incidental functions can become the purpose of coming together as a church or part of the church's mission. Some additional examples are:

- The water fountain:  
We might quench our thirst at worship assemblies; this does not authorize tea parties.
- Emergency shelter:  
We might use the building to keep an accident victim warm; this does not authorize a health clinic.
- Weed killer:  
We might put herbicide on the church property; this does not authorize hunger drives.
- Bathroom facility:  
Our building might have indoor necessary rooms; this does not authorize holding civil ceremonies.
- Fixing a button:  
Someone might repair their clothing in the church building; this does not authorize sewing parties.
- Secular discussions:  
We might talk about sports after worship services; this does not authorize a church ball team.

We will stop there; anyone should be able to recognize the difference in these matters. This list of examples could go on, and there is effectively no end to the things one could attempt to find authorized by such inane reasoning. To endeavor to find scriptural authority from such is to dabble in strife:

*Titus 3:9-11 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.*

## H. Conclusion

### 1. A call for self-surrender

In some congregations, when a member requests the use of church-owned property for a funeral, wedding, or other such function, a problem arises when the elders or men acting as elders consent to its use, though their authority rests on nothing more than the reasoning previously refuted. The problem becomes full scale when a brother asks them for their scriptural authority. Now, though unprepared to make a valid defense, they render their judgment to carry on the event anyway, proposing to study the matter more deeply at a later date.

Their decision to carry on is no doubt influenced by a desire to be true their word. However, it is far better to demonstrate that we are true, not to our word, but to **the** word. The world needs to see that Christians are devoted to following the will of God when the truth is understood, no matter the consequences. We commend the willingness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to face a fiery death for the truth (Daniel 3), but then we compromise the truth ourselves to hold on to our human traditions or merely avoid the awkwardness or embarrassment of changing a decision. This ought not be so. If we are crucified with Christ, we sacrifice our own will for the will of God.

*Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

*Romans 12:1, 2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

*2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

In Romans 12:1 and 2 Timothy 2:15, the word "present" translates PARISTANO {par-is-tan'-o}, which fundamentally indicates a standing beside. However, Thayer's definition includes, "...1a4) to place a person or

thing at one's disposal..." as it is repeatedly used in Romans 6 to describe a slave surrendering his own will to his master's bidding. Take care, lest we become servants of self (Romans 16:17, 18).

## 2. The need for instruction

Remember, it is the duty of those who would perform a thing to show the authority for it; it is not the duty of others to prove there is no authority (1 Peter 3:15). Notwithstanding, those who defend church dinner socials, weddings, and funerals often first assume they are pre-authorized on the basis of familiar traditions and customs, then later propose to study to see whether it is condemned in scripture. This is inverted reasoning. As a rule of hermeneutics, we need to consider a thing not authorized until we can prove that it is, rather than to consider it authorized until we can prove that it is not.

Consequently, authority should be established **before** we act, not **after**. If we don't know for certain, we ought not do it. Therefore, the actual problem in the afore-mentioned scenario is a lack of study and teaching (Hosea 4:6), which occurs long before the event described.

*Hebrews 5:12-6:2 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, **you need someone to teach you again the first principles** of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>14</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. <sup>1</sup> Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

We might think that discussions on authority, institutionalism, and church dinners, weddings, and funerals are meaty doctrinal issues, but they are not. "Teach" means "teach;" it does not mean to institutionalize, socialize, memorialize, or celebrate. This is not difficult; this is a basic, elementary principle that distinguishes the one true church from the denominations and man-made religious institutions that surround it. This only becomes complicated in our minds when we allow our emotions and the teachings of men and human traditions to distract us.

## 3. A plea for unity

We can probably all agree that it would be lawful for a church to not do any of the things mentioned in this section. For example, anyone who claims it is acceptable to have a church wedding will claim it is also acceptable not to have one. However, no one who affirms that the church should teach the gospel will also affirm it is acceptable not to do so. There is an obvious difference between the two.

Those who defend these activities claim they are only opinions, and they further claim that those who oppose are causing divisions by their weakness, ignorance, and dogmatism. However, our common ground is to not do these things. Therefore, the ones causing the division are the ones forcing what they admittedly proclaim are opinions on others whom they know conscientiously object, expecting them to violate their consciences. If these matters are truly opinions, those who defend them ought to be willing to concede before seeing a church divide. To refuse a concession would be dogmatism indeed. Consider the apostle Paul's exhortations to forebear with one another and maintain unity.

*Ephesians 4:1-6 <sup>2</sup> ...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...*

*Philippians 2:1-9 <sup>3</sup> Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others...*

*Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. <sup>14</sup> But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

*1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*



*1 Corinthians 9:22 To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

The true fact of the matter is that these things are not actually matters of opinion. They are doctrines for which scriptural validation has not been presented by those defending them. The Lord is pleading with us to put an end to division in His church, but this can only come by standing firm on sound doctrine.

*Ephesians 4:13-16 ...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

We need to let benevolent societies be benevolent societies, let social clubs be social clubs, let sporting leagues, fitness centers, rehab centers, funeral homes, wedding chapels, match-making associations, civic organizations, scouting groups, summer camps, community theater, schools, hospitals, and day care facilities be just those things that they are, and let the church be the church and do the glorious work for which God has masterfully designed it.

## Questions And Thoughts For Review: Things Not Work Of The Church

1. Are all activities with a moral or religious implication authorized as works of the church?
2. Are fund-raising activities expedencies for gospel teaching? If not, why – what is added, lost, or changed?
3. Is it the work of elders and deacons in the church to arrange house-cleaning schedules for elderly members who are capable of tending to these matters on their own or by assistance from family?
4. Is a wedding or a funeral merely an expediency for gospel teaching? If not, why – what is added, lost, or changed in both events?
5. Does the fact that God ordains marriage authorize church weddings? Explain your answer.
6. List some things that are significantly different between a wedding and a worship assembly. List some differences likewise regarding a funeral.
7. Is a funeral fundamentally a social affair or a religious affair?
8. Is it a work of the church to build or financially support hospitals, health clinics, or colleges?
9. Is it a work of the church to lobby with civil government or stage protests against bigotry, pornography, legalized abortion, legalized marijuana, or legalized homosexual marriage? Explain what would be the responsibility of the church as a body regarding these things. How does this compare to what is lawful for individuals?
10. Does a church-owned drinking fountain authorize church dinner socials? Explain your response.

## Footnotes:

Some material in this study is derived or directly quoted from the following texts, which are suggested for further study and additional information:

- (BDB) "Revised Whittaker's Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon," 1906, 1997, Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- (JHT) "A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament," Joseph Henry Thayer, 1979, Zondervan Publishing House
- "Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament: Based On Semantic Domains," Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, 1989, New York: United Bible Societies
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- "A Manual Grammar Of The Greek New Testament," 1927, 1955, Dana and Mantey, Macmillan Co.
- LXX Septuaginta (LXT) (Old Greek Jewish Scriptures) edited by Alfred Rahlfs, 1935, the German Bible Society
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- (TBA) "The Bible Almanac," Packer, Tenney, White, Jr., 1980, Thomas Nelson Publishers
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- "The Bible in English: Its History and Influence," 2003, David Daniell
- "Walking By Faith," Roy E. Cogdill, 1957, 1967, The Gospel Guardian Company
- "Old Issues Do Not Fade Away – A Study In Centralization Of Churches And Institutionalism," Gene Frost, 1975, 1976, Gospel Anchor
- (MW) The Merriam-Webster American English Dictionary Online, 2012
- Wikipedia: web-based free-content encyclopedia, 2012

Bible translations referenced in this work include:

KJV: King James Version (1611)

ASV: American Standard Version (1901)

NKJ: New King James Version (1982)

NAU: New American Standard Bible (1995)

YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862, 1898)

TNT: Tyndale New Testament (1534)

Bible quotations in this work are from the NKJ unless otherwise indicated. Anglicized equivalents of Greek and Hebrew words appear in all upper case characters with the approximate pronunciation following in braces.

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