

A Study of The Local Church
Lesson 2 - The Local Church and the individual Christian
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Introduction: Let us review our previous study on Bible Authority.

- A. We must have Bible authority for everything we do (**Col 3:17, 2 Jn 9**).
 - 1. This means giving book, chapter, and verse for our practices!
 - 2. Any practice which we cannot give scripture should be given up.
- B. Authority may be expressed in both a specific and general way.
 - 1. **General authority** includes all things necessary to fulfilling an authorized action. Here we find that there are things authorized by God which may not be specifically named.
 - 2. **Specific Authority** means that when God has specified a particular thing to be done. We must not make a substitute!
- C. We must consider context, settings and many other things to properly apply Bible authority.
 - 1. We can look at how the words of the Bible communicate to us by the common classifications of command, approved example, and inescapable conclusion.
 - 2. This is not "a church of Christ invention" but a common sense way of understanding any language.
 - 3. We could use other terminology.

I. Let us carefully define the question to be studied.

- A. There are two common positions that brethren may take.
 - 1. **Whatever the individual Christian may do, the church may do.**
 - a. Sometimes it is worded like this "The church, after all, is the members so when a Christian does a good deed, it is really the Lord's church that does it."
 - b. This view makes no distinction between the work of a Christian and the work of a local church.
 - 2. **There is a distinction between the work of an individual Christian and a local church.**
 - a. This view requires that the local church be addressed in the context of a passage before assuming church responsibility.
 - b. Therefore If a scripture addresses only the individual Christian this would not be enough to assume church action.
- B. What do we mean by the term "church"?
 - 1. There are three common usages in the New Testament.
 - a. It can be viewed as a relationship to Christ, sometimes distinguished in our language as "the universal church".
 - i. (**Mt 16:18; Eph 4:4; 1:22-23**) - There is only ONE church when used in this sense. Every Christian is a member of this church.
 - ii. This church is not a functional body, that is it does not have

- a organization or earthly headquarters by which it functions. The head of **this church is Christ** who is quartered or resides in heaven.
- iii. In the universal church there is no distinction between the individual and the church because the individual is the only functional part.
- b. It can be viewed as a functional body at a given location which we commonly call a local church or congregation (**I Cor 1:2; Rom 16:16; Gal 1:2**)
- i. In contrast with the universal church there are several local churches. This does not contradict **Ephesians 4:4** when it speaks of ONE CHURCH. There is only one church (relationship to Christ) but many local congregations (**Rom 16:16**).
- ii. This is where the real controversy lies. Is there a distinction between an individual Christian and a local church?
- c. It can be viewed as an assembly (**I Cor 14:33-34**).
- i. The basic meaning of the Greek word ekklesia translated "church" means to call out. Sometimes it means an assembly. In **Acts 19:32** this word is translated "assembly" and is dealing with an unruly mob.
- ii. In **1 Cor 14:33-34** the word church must mean an assembly or else a woman could never speak again after becoming a member of the church universal or a local church if either is the meaning!
- 2. There are three things necessary to establish a local church.
 - a. There is an agreement to work and worship together as a local church (**Acts 9:26**).
 - b. There is a common oversight (**I Pt 5:1-2**).
 - c. There is a pooling of resources (**I Cor 16:1-2**).
- 3. Please be careful how you use terms! Much confusion is created when we do not understand the meaning of words.
 - a. Some say any coming together of Christians constitutes a local church. For example some Christians may get together and pool their money to buy pizza. This is not a local church at work!
 - b. With these definitions in mind let us go to the Bible and see if any distinction exists.

II. Bible Passages Make a Distinction Between the Church and the Individual.

- A. (**Mt 18:15-17**) - Notice the responsibilities given by Jesus in each step.
 - 1. In Verse 15 the individual is to act, no church action yet.
 - 2. In verse 16 two or three individuals act, still no church action.
 - 3. In verse 17 the church now acts!
 - 4. When one individual acts or even a group acts this does not

constitute church action in this passage.

- B. **(1 Tim 5:16)** - When an individual takes care of his own, this does not constitute church action.
- C. **(Acts 5:4)** - Money that an individual has in his possession is under his control and oversight until he gives it. It then is under the control and oversight of the local church.
- D. Example: Consider the Christian who is a member of the Lion's Club.
 - 1. As he took time to help a needy person two individuals, one a Christian and the other a member of the Lion's club discussed his benevolent act. The member of the Lion's club said "Look, theirs the Lion's Club helping the poor!" while the Christian said "No, that is the local church helping the poor". Which is it? Neither! In fact it was that Christian helping the poor.
 - 2. What if two Christians committed adultery, would the local church be guilty of adultery?
 - 3. Denominations make the same mistake in **John 15:1-8** when they want the branches to be denominations. No, the branches are individuals.

III. There is a great difference between the responsibilities of an individual and the local church.

- A. Consider the various God given relationships the Christian sustains and what each Involves.
 - 1. **(Eph 6:4)** - There are family responsibilities of the Christian. These involve discipline, recreation, education, shelter, etc...
 - 2. **(Gal 6:10)** - There are community responsibilities of the Christian. These involve benevolence, community groups such as PTA, little league, Civic groups, and other groups such as March of dimes, etc...
 - 3. **(Rom 13:1-8)** - There are governmental responsibilities of the Christian. These involve paying taxes, any positive influence towards righteousness such as campaigning, running for office or making a contribution to a candidate.
 - 4. **(Eph 4:28; 2 Thess 3:10-12)** - There are economic responsibilities of the Christian. These involve any honest means of earning money such as working for an employer or operating your own business such as a hardware store, a college, a printing company, a bicycle shop, etc...
- B. Let us consider the consequences of failing to make a distinction.
 - 1. Look at the above responsibilities. Are you prepared to say that the church may do ALL of these things? If no, then ON WHAT BASIS CAN YOU OPPOSE THEM AND NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AND THE WORK OF THE INDIVIDUAL?
 - 2. Sadly false arguments used to justify pet projects of one

generation will be taken to their consistent conclusion by another generation! Brethren who push for no distinction are powerless to oppose the great church **sponsored recreational projects** and businesses of our day.

3. Some have tried to limit their argument by saying there is no distinction in "spiritual works" while only the individual may participate in "secular" work.

a. The Bible nowhere makes such a distinction! Can you give the scripture?

b. In **Eph 4:28** what is "spiritual" and what is "secular"?
A Christian is to work in order to give to the needy. Both are God given works and it is given in this passage to the individual! A person would be out of order to apply it to the local church.

C. Let us summarize the differences between the church and the individual.

TWO TREASURIES

Individual

Local Church

METHOD OF RAISING

A. By Honest Labor (**Eph 4:28**)

A. By Voluntary Offering
(**1 Cor 16:1-2**)

OVERSIGHT

A. The Individual (**Acts 5:4**)

A. Local Elders (**Acts 11:30;**
1 Pt 5:1-3)

USE

A. Contribution (**1 Cor 16:1-2**)

B. Pay Taxes (**Rom 13:17**)

C. Provide for Family (**1 Tim 5:16**)

A. Preaching Gospel (**2 Cor 11:8**)

B. Relieving Saints (**Acts 4:32-34**)

C. Edify Saints (**Eph 4:15-16**)