

A Study of the Local Church
Lesson 4 - The Organization God Gave the Local Church
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Introduction: Let us review our previous studies.

- A. Our attitudes will determine whether or not God's word will direct our lives.
 - 1. If we are willing we can know God's will. **(Jn 7:17)**
 - 2. Are you willing to be tested by the word of God?
- B. The solution to our differences lies in an understanding of Bible **authority**.
 - 1. We will stand before God and be judged by our willingness to stand within the law of God **(Mt. 7:21-23)**
 - 2. This means respecting the silence of the scriptures. **(Rev 22:18-19)**
 - 3. This stand has been ridiculed by many through the years but provides the only way to unity among brethren and acceptable service to God.
 - 4. We must then have authority (book, chapter, verse) for our practices. **(Col 3:17)**
- C. We must recognize the difference between the Universal church **(Mt 16:18)** and the local church. **(Rom 16:16)**
 - 1. We must not **confuse terms!**
 - 2. Only one is a functional body.
- D. There is a difference between the work of the individual Christian and the local church.
- E. We must abide within only those works authorized for the local church by the Lord.
 - 1. The local church is authorized by the scriptures to:
 - a. Preach the gospel **(2 Cor 11:8)**
 - b. Edify its members **(Eph 4:11-12)**
 - c. Relieve its members **(1 Cor 16:1-4)**
 - 2. The work therefore of the local church is:
 - a. That which is authorized for the local church to do.
 - b. That which is completely the work of the church.
 - c. That which the church may use its resources to support.
- F. In this lesson we will determine what organization is given for the local church.

I. Departures in God's will on organization has plagued the church historically.

- A. God provided for a local organization only! **(Phil 1:1; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 3:1,8; 1 Pt 5:1-2)**
- B. Consider the departures that produced the Catholic church and the Christian Church.
- C. God's Organization is sufficient! **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**

II. What Does Local Oversight Mean?

- A. Brethren often speak of the autonomy of the local church.
 - 1. This is a Bible concept which indicates self government **(Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2)**
 - 2. What has God chosen?
- B. What does Oversight mean?
 - 1. It cannot mean functioning as a lawgiver! **(Jas 4:12; Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23)**
 - 2. **episcopos** - an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things done by others are done rightly. (Thayer, p. 243)
 - 3. Those who oversee must abide within the authority of God.

- C. Consider the areas involved in local oversight.
 - 1. There is the care and discipline of members (**Heb 13:17**)
 - a. This involves teaching. (**Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:2**)
 - b. This involves discipline. (**1 Cor 5:1-5, 2 Thess 3:6**)
 - c. This is the responsibility of the local church to its own members!
 - 2. All of these things requires planning.
 - a. No one else has this responsibility for another church.
 - b. In preaching as well as in other areas of God's work, the local church must be responsible for selecting the men it uses! (**Acts 6:3**)

III. Bible Examples of a Local church doing its Work

- A. A local church may send out a preacher to a certain work. (**Acts 11:22**)
- B. Local churches may support a man in another area. (**Phil 4:15-16; 1:4-7; 2 Cor 11:8**)
- C. A local church may select men to assist in meeting a benevolent need. (**Acts 6:3-4**)
- D. A local church may send money to another church that is in need. (**1 Cor 16:1-4**)
- E. A local church when in need may receive funds from another church to use to relieve that need. (**Acts 11:30**)
- F. A local church can study God's word and solve its problems! (**Acts 15:2, 5-7**)
- G. Everything God assigned to the local church can be carried out through this organization!

IV. Violations of the Autonomy of the Local Church

- A. Autonomy may be surrendered in two possible ways.
 - 1. There may be coercion and pressure from others.
 - 2. It may be voluntarily surrendered.
 - 3. When part or the whole of work God gave the local church is surrendered to another organization, then the local autonomy of that church has been violated!
- B. Additions of organizations smaller than the local church
 - 1. It is possible to have Bible classes become a separate organization! The Christian church had "Ladies Aid Societies" that did this.
 - 2. Many "Bus Ministries" and "Campaigns" have become separate organizations.
- C. Additions of organizations larger than the local church
 - 1. The Christian church had the missionary society!
 - 2. Today brethren believe it is right for a local church to make contributions to colleges, orphan homes and independent evangelistic organizations to do its work.
- D. Why do brethren seek to arrange these centralized efforts?
 - 1. Some say it is more efficient. Is it really?
 - 2. Often we are 10 years behind whatever the denominations are doing.
 - 3. These large efforts have an appeal to the flesh.
 - 4. What does Bible history tells us? (**1 Sam 8:4-7**)

V. Centralized Organizations are a sure sign of decay and apostasy

- A. When a church seeks to do its work through other organization it is giving up its unique responsibility.
 - 1. Often when people fail in their individual duties they want someone else to do it! Often this is behind many who seek the help of organizations.
 - 2. Historians know this is a sure sign of stagnation.
- B. Satan always brings the church into apostasy when local autonomy is surrendered.
 - 1. Apostasy is gradual but follows a certain course. (**2 Tim 4:3-5**)

2. Consider the wisdom of God in overcoming apostasy. Human organizations eventually gain great power and influence! They will later use it for their own selfish interest!

Conclusion: God's organization is sufficient to do God's work.

- A. Let us recognize His wisdom and be busy in His work.
- B. Let us not be ashamed of God's ways.