

Back to the Basics

The Work of the Local Church

Memory Verse:
Hebrews 10:24-25

Establishing Authority

In lesson three, *Who is in Authority?*, we examined the subject of authority and who possesses this authority. In this lesson, we will take a closer look at how Christians are to establish Bible authority, thereby understanding what is and what is not authorized within the work of the local church. This understanding is important. Without proper understanding of authority, churches will find themselves following the unscriptural practices of the denominational world.

In Galatians 1:6-8, Paul issued the warning against anyone who would go beyond the authority of the scriptures in teaching anything other than what Jesus and the apostles preached. In 2 John 1:9-11, John warned that anyone who “*transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.*”

When we examine the New Testament, we are looking for items pertaining to the work of the local church which are expressly stated or commanded. For instance, regarding the need to repent of your sins, Jesus’ command everyone to repent. (Luke 13:3) An example of a command pertaining to the work of the local church would be in reference to the Lord’s supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, Paul recorded Jesus’ saying, “This do in remembrance of me.” Also, in Matthew 26:26-28, we see a direct command pertaining to the elements of the Lord’s supper. Jesus took the bread and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Jesus then took the fruit of the vine and said, “Drink from it, all of you.” Hence, we have a direct command to eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine.

After looking for direct commands, we must then give consideration to approved examples. Approved examples refer to certain examples seen in the divinely instructed actions and work of the first century congregations. We look for approved examples in the absence of direct commands. For instance, regarding the Lord’s supper, we have no direct command regarding when to partake of the Lord’s supper. However, in Acts 20:7, we have an approved example of a local church coming together to partake of the Lord’s supper. This serves as an example to all churches. Another instance of an approved example would be in the sending of relief to needy saints. In Acts 11:29-30, we have an example of one church (disciples in Antioch) sending relief to the elders in Jerusalem to be used to relieve the needs of saints during the coming famine.

The last step in reasoning what churches can and cannot do is to examine necessary inferences. Necessary inference refers to the inferring of a specific requirement that was not directly stated. A necessary inference is logically concluded from the text. For instance, going back to the

discussion of the Lord's supper, the Bible does not say that the saints partook of the Lord's supper every first day of the week. However, in Acts 20:7 we see that the saints gathered together on the first day of the week to break bread. The inference in this case is that they met every first day of the week. (To further support this reasoning, consider the Lord's command to Israel to remember the Sabbath Day. The Lord told Israel, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:10) Although the Lord did not specifically say that every seventh day was the Sabbath, the Israelites rightly understood that that was the Lord's intent.) Also, when Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, He used unleavened bread. How do we infer that the bread was unleavened? In Luke 22:1-20, we find that Jesus instituted the Lord's supper during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The only bread present was unleavened.

Seeking Authority

Direct Commands

Approved Examples

Necessary Inferences

Specifics, Expediencies, Aids, and Additions

We cannot have a discussion of authority without covering specifics, expediencies, aids, and additions. Let us begin by looking at specifics. Specifics refer to those elements that were expressly stated or implied. When determining authority using direct command, approved example, and necessary inference, we must look for specifics. Consider the following examples:

- Q God specified the use of gopher wood in the building of the ark. (Genesis 6:14)
- Q God commanded the local church to partake of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. (Acts 20:7)
- Q God commanded the local church to teach and admonish its members by singing spiritual songs. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- Q God commanded the saints to assemble together. (Hebrews 10:25)

Expediencies and aids refer to those elements which help to facilitate the carrying out of the commands. For instance, while God specified the use of gopher wood in the building of the ark, He did not specify what type of tools to use, i.e. saw, ax, nails, etc. The types of tools were apparently left up to Noah's judgment.

Regarding the Lord's supper, the Lord, through example, specified the first day of the week. However, the Lord did not specify the time of the day. Also, the Lord did not specify what types of cups were to be used, the number of cups, the size of the bread, who makes the bread, etc. The types of cups, the number of cups, etc. are left up to our judgment. They are simply expediencies.

Continuing with examples of expediencies, the Lord specified singing as the form of music to be used in the worship services. What the Lord did not specify is the number of songs, the length of the songs, the musical style of the songs, etc. Such decisions are left up to the church to decide. A song book is used as an expediency to help all the members sing the same song with decency and order. It is important to note that the Lord said nothing about playing a musical instrument.

One more example of an expediency deals with the time of day when the church is to assemble. The Lord commanded the saints to assemble. However, the Lord did not specify the time of day, the number of assemblies per week, etc. Also, the Lord did not specify where the congregation was to assemble, how the congregation was to obtain an assembly place, the size of the meeting place, etc. The lights, ceiling fans, water fountains, etc., could be considered as expediencies or aids to the fulfilling of the command to worship.

Let us talk briefly about additions. Additions are those elements which add to the Lord's commands. Unlike specifics, expediencies, and aids, adding to the commands of God is one practice from which Christians must stay away. God will punish all who add to or take away from His Word. (cf. Revelation 22:18-19) Consider some examples of additions.

- Q If Noah had built a fourth floor on the ark, then he would have been adding to God's word.
- Q Adding a third element to the Lord's supper would be adding to the word of God.
- Q Using musical instruments in the worship services of the local church would be adding to God's word.
- Q If a congregation assembles to worship God and they bring in a secular element, something from the world, then they are adding to the commands of God.

A good rule of thumb in determining whether or not an element is an expediency (aid) or addition is to consider the end of the command in question. If what you end with is different from the command, then you have made an addition to the command. If, however, you have the same command that you started with, then you used an expediency or aid. Consider the command to sing. When you sing using a song book, pitch pipe (to get the proper pitch in starting the song), lights and pews, you have not changed the basic command to sing. However, when you sing using a piano or any other musical instrument, when you are finished, you have played and sung. This is contrary to the command to sing. This is why musical instruments are an addition to the Lord's command to sing, and therefore, not authorized by the Bible.

Organization

Having shown the process through which a local church can determine what is and what is not authorized, let us move on to the discussion of the work of the local church. The proper work of the local church is crucial to the local church being the "pillar and ground of truth" in the community. (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15)

The work of the local church begins with organization. Every local church should strive to appoint a plurality of qualified elders (bishops). (1 Timothy 3:1-7) Two such examples are found in Acts 14:23 and 20:17. Elders are to have oversight of the local church. Peter instructed the elders, "*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as*

Facts About Elders

Scripturally qualified
Plurality of elders
Oversee the local church
Shepherd the church
Guard the church
Rule the church
Church in submission

overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:2-3, NKJV) In the process of overseeing, the elders are to shepherd or feed the local church. (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3) The elders are also to guard the flock against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31) and they are to rule (oversee) the flock. (1 Timothy 5:17) The members of the local church are to obey the elders. (Hebrews 13:17)

In addition to elders, the organization of the local church calls for a plurality of qualified deacons. (In Philippians 1:1, Paul referred to the deacons in the church at Philippi. Also, Paul gave the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.) The Greek word translated as deacon means helper, servant, or minister. From the meaning of the definition of the word deacon, we see that the deacon is to be a helper or servant of the local church. Acts 6:1-7 contains a possible example of deacons being appointed.

Continuing on with the study of the local church, we see that every church is to be made up of members of the body of Christ, Christians. When a person is added to the body of Christ, he is to be joined or identified with a local congregation. Consider the example of Paul. Acts 9:26 reads, “*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.*” (NKJV) One particular example of a working member of the church of Christ in Cenchrea was a member named Phoebe. (Romans 16:1,2) In Paul’s letter to the church in Rome, he listed several Christians who were apparently members of the church of Christ in Rome or at least worked with the brethren in Rome. See chart to the left, *Members of the Church in Rome*.

Work of the Local Church

One of the responsibilities of the local church is to provide assemblies for the saints. The assemblies provide a means whereby Christians can worship their father in Heaven and receive spiritual nourishment. The assemblies enable saints to fulfill all the elements of worship as seen in lesson six, *The Facts About Worship*.

- Q Assemblies on the first day of the week are provided so that Christians can be reminded of Jesus’ death on the cross of Calvary. (See lesson six, *The Facts About Worship*, pages 44-45) This weekly reminder is important to Christians living a godly life when they are away from the worship services. When we face the daily challenges of our lives, it is

Members of the Church in Rome

Romans 16:3-15

Priscilla and Aquila

Epaenetus

Mary

Andronicus and Junia

Amplias

Urbanus

Stachys

Apelles

Household of Aristobulus

Herodion

Household of Narcissus

Tryphena

Tryphosa

Persis

Rufus

Asyncritus

Phlegon

Hermas

Patrobas

Hermes

Philologus

Julia

Nereus and his sister

Olympas

crucial that we always carry about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus. This will enable us to manifest (show) the life of Jesus in our lives. (2 Corinthians 4:7-12)

- Q Assemblies provide Christians with an opportunity to sing praises to God, thereby receiving edification and admonition. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- Q Assemblies are opportunities for those present to be taught the word of God. The Christians are rebuked and exhorted by the lessons. The unbeliever is taught to believe. (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:24; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:2)

- Q During the assemblies, we go to our heavenly Father in prayer. (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1-3, 8)
- Q One the first day of the week, when saints come together to worship God, they also lay in store for the work of the local church. (1 Corinthians 16:1,2; Acts 4:32-37)

Understanding the importance of the assemblies, Christians should do their best to attend all the assemblies of the saints. We must carefully weigh the importance of that which would interfere with us being present at the services. Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some. (Hebrews 10:24,25)

Another responsibility of the local church is evangelism. As Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:15, the local church is to be the pillar and ground of the Truth. As we have shown in lesson six and in this lesson, evangelism (or teaching the Gospel) is one of the reasons why Christians assemble together. However, the evangelistic efforts of the local church are not limited to the local assemblies. According to Acts 13:1-3, the local church can send people out to teach the gospel to other places. The local church can also collectively support the gospel being taught in other areas. (2 Corinthians 11:8-9)

Edification of the saints is another responsibility of the local church. The Hebrew writer wrote, *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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.”* (Hebrews 10:24,25, NKJV) The apostle Paul reminded the brethren in Corinth that all things are to be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26) Part of the edification comes through the songs that we sing. (Colossians 3:15-16)

Giving aid to saints in need is also a responsibility of the local church. One such example is found in Acts 11:29-30, which reads, *“Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”* (NKJV) Another example is found in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, when Paul wrote, *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 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.”* (NKJV) All the examples of the local church giving or sending aid shows the aid being given to saints or fellow Christians.

Local Church
Works

Evangelism
Edification
Benevolence

Ten Questions

1. What warning did Paul issue in Galatians 1:6-8? _____

2. What are the three ways for establishing authority for the works of the local church? _____

3. Be prepared to explain the use of necessary inferences in establishing authority for the work of the local church. _____

4. What are expediencies and aids? _____
5. According to 1 Peter 5:2-3, what are the responsibilities of elders or bishops? _____

6. Following the example of Paul, what should a person do after becoming a Christian or moving to a new area? _____
7. List some of the benefits of assembling with the saints. _____

8. List the two specific elements of worship which takes place only on the first day of the week. _____

9. According to Hebrews 10:24,25 why should Christians assemble with the saints? _____

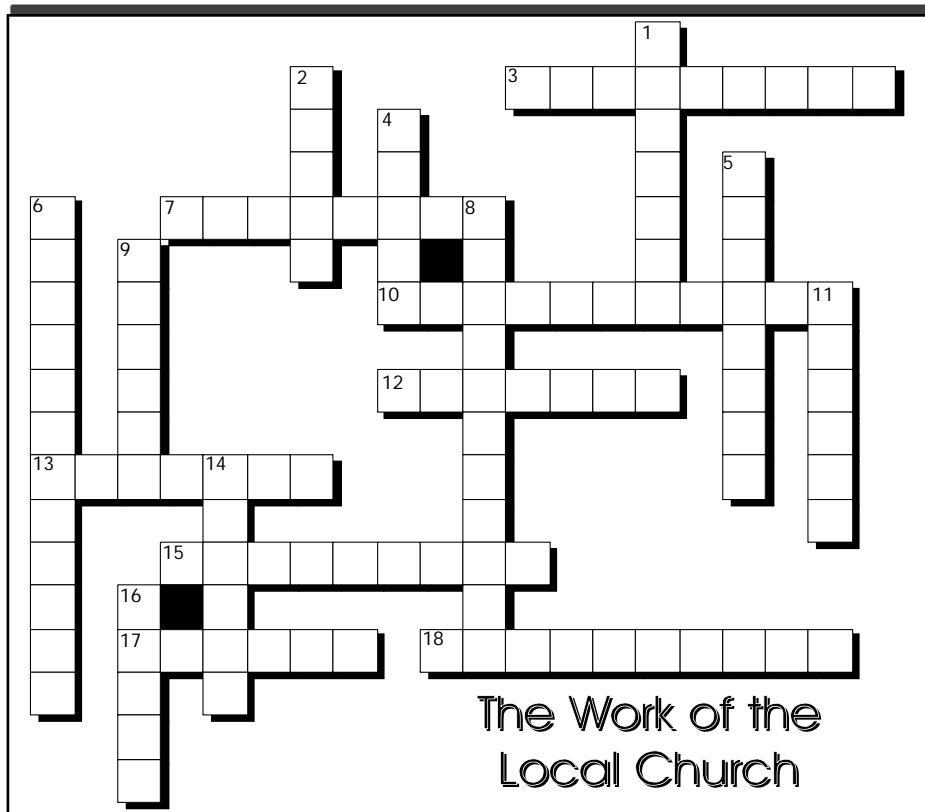
10. To whom is the local church to give aid out of its treasury? _____

True or False

1. T or F : Direct commands are one way of establishing Bible authority.
2. T or F : Necessary inference is not a reliable means of establishing authority.
3. T or F : When God specified gopher wood to Noah, He excluded all other woods.
4. T or F : It is acceptable to God for man to add to His word.
5. T or F : The members of a local church are not required to submit to the elders.
6. T or F : Adding musical instruments to the worship services would not be an addition.
7. T or F : It is acceptable to forsake the assembling of the saints.
8. T or F : The evangelistic efforts of the local church are limited to the local assemblies.
9. T or F : According to Paul, the saints were to lay by in store on the seventh day of the week.
10. T or F : When moving to a new church, it is not necessary to place membership.

A Little Fun

(Use the lesson text to answer these questions.)



Across

3. Necessary _____ is a method of establishing authority.
7. "And let us _____ one another in order to stir up love and good works,"
10. "... teaching and _____ one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (KJV)
12. Direct _____ is one method of establishing authority.
13. Approved _____ is another method of establishing authority.
15. "Not _____ the assembling of ourselves together,"
17. "I _____ other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you."
18. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and _____"

Down

1. "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and _____."
2. Elders are to guard the flock against _____ teachers.
4. The disciples in Antioch sent relief for the brethren in _____.
5. "... that the life also of Jesus might be made _____ in our body." (KJV)
6. _____ refer to those elements which help to facilitate the carrying out of the commands.
8. "This do in _____ of me."
9. Priscilla and _____ were Paul's fellow workers in Christ Jesus.
11. God told Noah to use this type of wood to build the ark.
14. This person was a servant of the church in Cencrea.
16. "_____ from it, all of you."

Passages in this Lesson

Genesis 6:14	pg 52	2 Corinthians 11:8-9	pg 55
Exodus 20:10	pg 52	Galatians 1:6-8	pg 51
Matthew 26:26-28	pg 51	Ephesians 5:19	pg 52,54
Luke 13:3	pg 51	Philippians 1:1	pg 54
Luke 22:1-20	pg 52	Colossians 3:15-16	pg 55
Acts 2:42	pg 55	Colossians 3:16	pg 52,54
Acts 4:32-37	pg 55	1 Timothy 2:1-3,8	pg 55
Acts 6:1-7.	pg 54	1 Timothy 3:1-7	pg 53
Acts 9:26	pg 54	1 Timothy 3:8-13	pg 54
Acts 11:29-30	pg 51,55	1 Timothy 3:15	pg 53,55
Acts 13:1-3	pg 55	1 Timothy 4:13	pg 55
Acts 14:23	pg 53	1 Timothy 5:17	pg 53
Acts 20:7	pg 51,52,55	2 Timothy 2:2	pg 55
Acts 20:17	pg 53	2 Timothy 4:2	pg 55
Acts 20:28-31.	pg 53	Hebrews 10:24,25	pg 55
Romans 16:1,2	pg 54	Hebrews 10:25	pg 52
Romans 16:3-15	pg 54	Hebrews 13:17	pg 53
1 Corinthians 11:23-24	pg 51	1 Peter 5:1-3	pg 53
1 Corinthians 14:26	pg 55	2 John 1:9-11	pg 51
1 Corinthians 16:1,2	pg 55	Revelation 22:18-19	pg 53
2 Corinthians 4:7-12	pg 54		