
Following Jesus -- Course B

Instructions:

Please take all courses in order as listed on our home page (the computer will ask!). If you have not done all the lessons of previous courses, please [click here to go to the beginning](#).

If you have not already done so, save this lesson to your computer using the "save" feature of your browser or PDF reader. Then print out the lesson (or at least open it in your browser or PDF reader **offline** – not on the Internet). Read the lesson and **study in your Bible the passages indicated >>> Scripture <<<**. Following each passage, study each question that has a number enclosed in asterisks (*1*, *2*, etc.), and **write down your answers on paper**. Some questions include more than one number because they have more than one blank to fill in. ("Think" questions should be carefully considered for your own benefit, but your answers will not be submitted to us.) Please take your time, study each passage carefully, answer the questions honestly, and consider the applications to your own life (John 12:48; 2 Tim. 2:15).

When you have studied the whole lesson and written down answers to all the indicated questions, return to the menu for this course on our web site at www.BibleStudyLessons.com and click on the link for the **answer quiz** for this lesson (or simply click on the link at the end of this lesson). Follow the directions to submit your answers and receive your grade. You will then be given an opportunity to see the correct answers to the questions. Please save this lesson and the correct answers for future reference.

Then move on to the next lesson or the next course in order. **Please study all lessons in all courses in order as listed in the menus on our web site.**

Thank you for your interest, and God bless your study of His word.

Church Organization and Work – #2

Following Jesus, Course B, Lesson 8

Introduction:

The previous lesson discussed the importance of following Bible authority in the local church's organization and work. Local churches must not change their emphasis from authorized spiritual activities to activities that satisfy physical desires. And individual Christians must not shift their responsibilities to the local church. In this study we examine other areas where we must respect the Bible pattern.

V. Limits on Responsibility to Care for the Needy

We have learned that the Bible distinguishes individual duty from local church duty. Notice the distinction regarding care for needy people.

A. Men Should Work to Provide for Their Needs.

>>> Please read Ephesians 4:28. <<< [Cf. 1 Thess. 4:11,12.]

1 How should individuals meet their needs? Answer: Instead of stealing a man should _____.

>>> Please read 2 Thessalonians 3:10. <<<

2 What should happen to one who is able to work but refuses? Answer: If a man will not work, he should not _____.

Think: Should local churches care for able-bodied people who could care for themselves but refuse to work?

B. Individuals Should Care for Needy Relatives.

>>> Please read 1 Timothy 5:4,8,16. <<<

3 Who should provide for needy people who have relatives? (a) the local church, (b) no one, (c) their relatives, (d) it does not matter. Answer: _____.

Think: If needy people have Christian relatives, should the church just help those needy people or should the church teach the Christians to fulfill their duty? (Cf. Gen. 3:17–19; Matt. 15:4–6; Esth. 2:7.)

C. Individuals Should Help Any Destitute People.

>>> Please read Luke 10:25–37; Matthew 25:31–46. <<<

4 What kind of needs should individuals help meet? (a) sickness and injury, (b) lack of food or clothing, (c) imprisonment, (d) all of these. Answer: _____.

(Cf. Eph. 4:28; Acts 9:36–39; 20:34,35; etc.)

>>> Please read James 1:27. <<<

5 Who should be cared for according to this passage? Answer: Christians should visit _____.

Note: Context shows this refers to the work of individuals, not of local churches: (v19 – "every man"; v23 – "any...he...a man...his"; v24 – "he ...himself...his...man he"; v25 – "he...this man...his"; v26 – "any man...his ...his own...this man's"; v27 – "himself"). The one being addressed is a "man" (v19,23,24,25,26) who has a "natural face" (v 23), "tongue" (v26), "heart" (v26), and a "self" (v24,27). Clearly this refers to an individual. To apply this to the church is to misuse the passage.

>>> Please read Galatians 6:10. <<<

6,7 To whom should we do good? Answer: Do good to _____ especially to the _____.

Again the context is discussing the work of individuals, not of local churches. "We" in v10 means: v3 – "a man...himself...he...he...himself"; v4 – "every man...his...he...himself alone...not another"; v5 – "every man... his own"; v6 – "him...him"; v7–9 – "a man...he...he...his...he...us...we...we." V7–9 are discussing our eternal destinies, a matter that is determined individually, not congregationally.

These verses discuss individual work. Individuals, as they are able, should care for all people who have need, especially their own relatives. To learn what the local church should do, however, we must examine verses that discuss church work.

D. Local Churches Care for Destitute Members.

Some people believe the church should help people in general, whether or not they are Christians. But note:

Every passage about church benevolence specifies that members should be helped.

The following passages describe churches helping needy people. For each passage, list in the answer box the word(s) that show whether or not the people helped were Christians ("saints," "believers," etc.). (We have done one for you to show you what to look for.) (Cf. 1 Tim. 5:3–16.)

8 >>> Please read Acts 2:44,45; 4:32–35; 6:1–3. <<< Answer: The church helped ___all that believed (or them that believed or the number of the disciples)___

9 >>> Please read Acts 11:27–30. <<< Answer: The church helped _____ (v29).

10 >>> Please read Romans 15:25–27. <<< Answer: The church helped _____

11 >>> Please read 1 Corinthians 16:1,2. <<< Answer: The church helped _____

12>>> Please read 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12. <<< Answer: The church helped _____

Think: Consider the following parallels:

* Passages about the Lord's supper specify we should use unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. Should we add hamburger and Coke?

* Baptism is specifically for those who believe and repent. Should we also baptize babies without God's authority?

* Likewise God told local churches specifically to care for needy members. Should they care for non-members without God's authority?

Individuals should fulfill their physical duties, not shift them to the local church. This helps the church avoid unauthorized works and keeps it free to maintain its God-given emphasis on meeting people's spiritual needs, while fulfilling a limited role in helping destitute members.

VI. Independence in Local Church Organization

A. Christ Is the Head of the Church.

>>> Please read Ephesians 1:22,23. <<<

13 Who is head of the church? (a) the Pope, (b) Jesus, (c) no one. Answer: _____.

>>> Please read Hebrews 8:1. <<<

14 Where is Jesus now? (Cf. Acts 1:9–11; 2:33.) Answer: Jesus sat down at the right hand of the throne in _____.

Think: Where then is the headquarters of Jesus' church?

Jesus is the only Head of His church, and He is in heaven. So the true church has no earthly head, headquarters, centralized governing bodies, or universal officers. (See also Eph. 5:22–25; Col. 1:18.)

B. Each Local Church Should Function Independently from Other Churches.

>>> Please read Acts 14:23. <<<

15 As they mature, how many churches should appoint elders? Answer: Elders were appointed in _____ church.

Note that each church had elders, plural, not just one elder.

>>> Please read Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1–3. <<<

16 What work do elders do? Elders (a) feed (shepherd, tend) the flock, (b) serve as overseers (bishops), (c) set good examples, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____

17 What flock would a particular eldership oversee? (a) the one among them, (b) all churches in their region, (c) all churches everywhere, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____

Note that these verses use the terms "elders," "bishops," and "pastors" (shepherds) interchangeably. Further, these men must meet Divine qualifications in order to be appointed (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).

Think: Since each church should have its own elders, and since those elders oversee the flock "among them," would any men have the right to oversee or make decisions for more than one local church?

We conclude that God wants the work of each congregation to be supervised by Scriptural officers within that local church. Since each church should develop its own local officers, each should function independently from other local churches. God's plan is perverted when the work and funds of many churches are centralized under the supervision of any one man or body of men.

C. Central Organizations Are Unauthorized.

Prophecy and history both reveal that many perversions have occurred in the organization of the church. Consider some examples.

Catholic and Protestant central organizations

The Pope is earthly head of the Roman church. Under him, cardinals, bishops, etc. supervise the work of many local churches. Protestant denominations likewise have centralized headquarters, councils, societies, and officers that supervise the work of many local churches.

Think: Do these arrangements agree with what we have learned?

Missionary societies

Jesus' church divided when men introduced centralized missionary societies under a board of directors. The board (not the elders of a local church) receives funds from many churches, then it decides what preachers would be supported, when, where, how much, etc.

Think: What Bible principles are violated by this arrangement?

Benevolent societies

Division came again when men formed centralized benevolent institutions such as orphan homes, widows' homes, etc., supervised by boards of directors. Churches donate funds to the board (not the elders of a local church), which in turn decides who to help, when, where, etc.

Think: Are these arrangements different in principle from the missionary societies? What Bible principles do they violate?

Note: In principle, such boards are the first step toward a central denominational government. If some work of some churches can be centralized under a board, why cannot **all** the work of **all** the churches be centralized? Is there a consistent stopping place? In fact, no New Testament church ever donated funds to any central man-made institution.

VII. The Pattern for Local Church Cooperation

A. Local Churches May Cooperate Scripturally.

The pattern for church support of preachers

>>> Please read Acts 11:22–24. <<<

18 What did Jerusalem do for the Antioch church? (cf. 13:1–3) Answer: They sent _____ to exhort or encourage them.

>>> Please read Philippians 4:14–18. <<<

19 What did Philippi do for Paul? (a) set up a missionary board, (b) sent to help with his needs, (c) asked the headquarters to help him. Answer: _____.

>>> Please read 2 Corinthians 11:8,9. <<<

20 What work did several churches do on Paul's behalf? Answer: What Paul lacked (needed or wanted), was _____ by brethren who came from Macedonia.

Note that each church decided for itself what preacher(s) it would send, whom it would support, when, where, how much, etc. In evangelism, churches did not donate funds to other churches; rather, funds were sent to preachers through messengers (Phil. 4:18; 2:25; 2 Cor. 11:8,9).

The pattern for church-to-church donations

There are, however, a few examples in which churches did send donations to other churches. Let us consider them.

>>> Please read Acts 11:27–30. <<<

21 Who sent a gift to whom? Answer: The disciples in Antioch sent relief to the brethren in _____.

22 What was the purpose of the gift? Answer: The gift was sent as relief because there was a _____.

>>> Please read 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:4,12–15; 9:1,12; Romans 15:25–27. <<<

23 Who sent gifts to whom? Answer: Churches in various places sent to the church in _____.

24 What was the purpose of the gift? The gift was (a) to relieve needy saints, (b) to support a gospel preacher, (c) to support a missionary society, (d) to distribute literature throughout the world. Answer: _____.

Let us summarize the principles for church-to-church donations:

* Churches donated funds to another church only if **the receiving church was unable to care for its own needy, destitute members** (Acts 11:28,29; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:13–15; 9:12).

* **The purpose of the gift was to relieve needy members.** Churches with "abundance" sent to relieve members who were in need compared to the sending churches -- 2 Cor. 8:13–15 (9:12; Acts 11:29).

* The contributing was **temporary, lasting only till the emergency circumstance was relieved** -- 2 Cor. 8:14 (note "now at this time"). The receiving church intended to overcome its problem and become financially independent again ("their abundance may also be a supply for your want").

* In this way, **local church independence and equality were maintained** (2 Cor. 8:13–15). Each church was free from destitution, but no eldership controlled the affairs of any other church. Each eldership maintained its authority to oversee the affairs of the local church (as described earlier in 1 Pet. 5:1ff; etc.).

The purpose of church-to-church donations is as clear and binding as the purpose for baptism, the Lord's supper, etc. In each case the receiving church had an emergency need among its own members. It received temporary help only till it could overcome its problem and become financially independent again.

B. Centralized Cooperation Is Unscriptural.

Scriptural cooperation requires us to oppose centralization of the work, funds, or oversight of local churches. Missionary and benevolent societies, as already studied, violate this pattern of cooperation. Now:

Consider "sponsoring elderships."

This arrangement involves works that are the independent responsibility of many churches, but one eldership "assumes the oversight" of the work for all the churches. However, they know the church where they serve cannot finance the work, so they ask for funds from other churches.

Works done in this way include radio and TV programs, orphan homes, campaigns for Christ, area-wide workshops, support of preachers in a foreign field, national literature distribution, etc.

Sponsoring elderships are unscriptural.

Consider the principles of cooperation as applied to this case:

- * Is the receiving church **incapable of meeting the needs of its own members**? Modern "sponsoring churches" are often relatively wealthy churches that even send donations to other churches!
- * Is the **purpose of the gifts to relieve destitute members** in the receiving church? The purpose is usually some form of evangelism.
- * Are **churches with abundance sending to relieve a needy church**? Often the receiving churches are relatively wealthy, whereas contributing churches are relatively poor.
- * Is the arrangement **intended to be temporary**? The elders assume the work knowing they cannot afford it and never intending that they will afford it.

The result of the "sponsoring eldership" arrangement is **inter-dependence, centralization, and inequality**. The sponsoring elders oversee more than the work of one local church. They oversee the centralized funds of many churches to do a centralized work (not a local need), which is just as much the responsibility of the sending churches. Each church no longer oversees its own work independently from other churches. An on-going relationship is established in which the sending churches depend on the sponsoring church for oversight, and the sponsoring church depends on the sending churches for money.

This too is a first step toward centralized church government. If one church can oversee some of the funds from some churches to do some of their work, why cannot one church oversee **all** the money to do **all** the work for **all** the churches? Where do you draw the line Scripturally? Remember that the Catholic hierarchy began with elders assuming more than local authority: the Pope is the bishop of one church who oversees the work of all the other churches.

If we believe churches should work independently yet cooperate Scripturally, then we must oppose all forms of church centralization.

Conclusion

People who favor Scriptural church work and organization, must oppose all unauthorized changes in these areas. Yet all denominations violate these principles, and even many "non-denominational" churches have departed from them.

Fortunately, many local churches have stood for the truth. Christians should insist on being part of a local church that not only practices the truth but also teaches the truth so people can avoid error.

Personal application questions:

(These questions are for you to ponder. Your answers will help us understand your thinking, however they will not affect your "score.")

25 Do you believe in centralized church organization or independent local churches?

26 Are you a member of a church affiliated with a central headquarters?

27 While you have been studying this course, have you made any significant changes in your faith, spiritual conduct, church membership, or relationship with God? If so, please explain.

When you have carefully studied this lesson and written down answers to all the questions, [click on this link to submit your answers.](#)

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