

**Lesson 4 – What is the Work of a Local Church?
(How Should We Use the Contribution?)**

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Introduction: Will we let Jesus be Lord over local churches?

- A. Why not let our Lord tell us *the nature and function* of the local church. **(Lk 6:46)**
 - 1. We are to be a people that respect God’s authority *just as Jesus respected the Father’s authority*. **(Jn 14:10-11, 20-21)**
 - 2. This submission is *a product of knowing God* and recognizing that “all things” that we are to do has been delivered through a revealed message. **(Jn 17:6-8)**
 - 3. It is this attitude that *calls us out of the world* and *causes the world to hate us*. **(Jn 17:6, 14-17)**
- B. The Lord established churches as a spiritual institution with a spiritual mission. The primary function of local churches is *to plant God’s word in the hearts of men*. **(Eph 4:11-12; Jn 6:44-45)**
 - 1. The “world” makes decisions and determines “standards” *in a very different way*. (Once a goal has been set, then you can lie, cheat, etc. to achieve the goal!)
 - 2. Consider *the three ways the world sets “standards.”*
 - a. What *will work*? **(Utilitarian practicality)**
 - b. What *do most people accept*? **(Majority rule)**
 - c. Who has *the strength to impose* their will on everyone else? **(Power Politics)**

“The church which is married to the Spirit of its Age will be a widow in the next.”
—William Ralph Inge (*The Cultural Church* F. LaGard Smith p. 75)

- 2. Those churches that “know God” will *always ask for authority*, that is give book, chapter and verse for “every good work” in scripture. **(2 Tim 3:16-17)**
- I. Let’s take all God has said about local churches and stay within what is revealed**
- A. We are dealing with what a *local church* may do. This requires that the local church *be addressed in the context of a passage* before *assuming* church responsibility.
 - 1. Again what the individual Christian may do *is not under consideration!*
 - 2. This means *collective action* and *not individual action*.
 - 3. Many have made the mistake that if a local church cannot do a certain work *then the work will not be done*. This is why local churches are increasing involved in things that *should be left to families*. (Ex. Recreational activities)
 - 4. The *bulk of the Lord’s work is done by individuals*. You cannot fulfill your work as a Christian by proxy.
 - B. The work of the church involves *that which is authorized* by scripture.
 - 1. Did the Lord provide sufficient instructions *to guide us in our collective work*? Is there a pattern given to produce uniformity among local churches? **(1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33-37)**
 - 2. Remember the gospel was spread to the whole world under the arrangements *God authorized for the church in the first century*. **(Col 1:23)**

3. We are first and foremost obligated to give authority (Book ,Chapter and Verse) for all that a local church teaches and practices. If we cannot then we should cease that teaching or practice!
 4. A previous generation wanted to apply Bible authority to the worship of the local church (instrumental music) but not to the work of the local church.
- C. The work of the church involves the use of its resources for the work.
1. God has authorized a collection for the work of the local church. **(1 Cor 16:1-2)**
 2. The resources of the local church constitute the treasury and those things purchased from the treasury that are overseen by the church.
 3. This would include the building or other things purchased from the treasury.
- D. The work of the church involves that which is wholly (completely) its work.
1. Only that which is authorized may be done with God's approval. To mix that which is authorized in with things that are not authorized is in effect a substitution for what God has said.
 2. When we are told to preach the gospel that would not include playing baseball or campaigning for a political office. Someone may preach while playing, but playing baseball and preaching the gospel are two separate activities!
 3. Error is most effective when mixed with lots of truth! (Ex. Rat poison)
- E. How did God choose to equip His people? **(Eph 4:11-12)**
1. It is easy to become sidetracked on things that appeal to our flesh but in the end these things do nothing for the work of God.
 2. All apostasy comes from this desire to satisfy ourselves. **(2 Tim 4:2-4)**
 3. Be prepared! You will be in for a fight with those that close their Bibles! **(Rom 8:5-8; Jer 6:16-17)**
 4. When Bibles are closed it is easy to be comfortable with the things that we have always done. When one generation is satisfied with abandoning the need for authority in one area then the next generation will go much further.
 5. We are laying a foundation for reason and discussion. Discussion without a foundation will create confusion and anger!!

III. What is the work of the local church in evangelism?

- A. God has authorized local churches to be involved in the preaching of God's word. **(Phil 4:15-16; 2 Cor 11:8)**
1. God's word will not return unto Him void. Let us teach it to all! **(Isa 55:11)**
 2. When scripture gives authority to act, then all things necessary to complete that action are authorized even though they may not be specifically named. Some have described this principle as "general authority."
 3. When God specifies a particular thing to be done then we must do what is specified. When God specifies then we must not substitute! Some have described this as specific authority.
- B. A church has several possible choices under general authority. They could pay a preacher, buy tracts, have a radio or TV program, conduct a gospel meeting, or publish ads in the newspaper as long as the gospel alone is preached.

C. There are things these verses *do not authorize*:

1. **Some other activity**

- a. False doctrine is not authorized.
- b. Political campaigns are not authorized.
- c. Recreation is not authorized. (Example: How would a Ping-Pong table be considered as an aid to preaching the gospel?)

2. **Violation of other scriptural principles**

- a. The local church would not use an arrangement like the missionary society. Why? Because of what the Bible teaches about *the organization of a local church*. (We will study this in the next lesson.)
- b. We are not *to substitute for the drawing power of the gospel* by an appeal to the flesh. (**Jn 6:44-45; 26-27, Rom 1:16-17**)

IV. What is the work of the local church in edification?

A. To edify means *to build others up by teaching God's word*.

1. Edification occurs when *God's word is received in one's heart*. (**Acts 20:32**)
2. In edification there is *no substitute for God's word*. (**Eph 4:15-16**)

B. God has authorized local churches *to be involved in the edifying of its members*. (**Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 14:26**)

C. A church has several *possible choices under general authority*. They could have Bible classes, distribute printed material, use an overhead projector, publish a church bulletin as long as this is *the teaching found in God's word*.

1. There are some things *required under specific authority*! They must have an assembly of the whole church to do certain things. (**1 Cor 14:23; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2**)
2. We must have an assembly *on the first day of the week*.

D. There are things these verses *do not authorize*:

1. **Some other activity**

- a. Again, *false doctrine* is not authorized. It is also condemned.
- b. *Political campaigns* are not authorized.
- c. *Recreation* is not authorized. (Example: How would a Ping-Pong table be considered as an aid to edifying Christians?)
- d. *Social functions* are not authorized such as "fellowship" halls, church parties, church camps.

2. **Violation of other scriptural principles**

- a. If the Bible classes were made into *their own separate functional body*.
- b. *Women preachers* would be a violation of **1 Cor 14:33-34**.

V. What is the work of the local church in relieving needy members?

A. God has authorized local churches to be involved *in the relief of its members*. (**Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 9:12-14**)

1. Remember that we are considering *the collective work* of the local church.

Because a local church is limited in its work that does not limit the scope of what an individual Christian may do!

2. When all these verses are considered then what is the work of a local church?
 3. The work of the church is not to eliminate all poverty and disease in the world!
- B. A church has several possible choices under general authority. They could buy or rent a building, provide caregivers or buy services of a hospital or nursing facility. **(Acts 6:1-7)**

C. There are things these verses do not authorize:

1. **Some other activity**

- a. Recreation is not authorized. (Example: How would a Ping-Pong table be considered as an aid to reliving a needy Christian?)
- b. A business arrangement.

2. **Violation of other scriptural principles**

- a. Use of another organization.
- b. Church hospitals, church business...

VI. What is the difference between man's opinion and that which God requires?

A. If we have no authority to act then this is walking beyond what is written. This is more than just an opinion! **(1 Cor 4:6-7)**

1. Please be careful not to label a question as "opinion" and then to cease studying.
2. I do not want someone to become obsessed with this issue either. You may need to take a break and come back to these questions later.
3. I am not disappointed that some may disagree with me on some applications. True growth in knowledge and wisdom often comes with conflict and struggle!
Let us continue to study and work together as Christian who love each other.

B. There is room for opinions within that which is already proven to be authorized.

Expediency exists only when a thing is authorized. **(1 Cor 6:12; 10:23)**

1. I may eat meat and you eat only vegetables. Tastes and opinions will differ.
2. However, I need to be a servant and be mindful of the effect my actions may have on others. Remember, a thing may be lawful but "not edify."
3. In a collective work this becomes crucial. How we use our treasury should be done with great care and communication! **(1 Cor 10:23-24; 31-33)**
4. Example should we paint the auditorium in pink and purple polka dots?

Conclusion: Let the local church be the local church!

A. When we seriously attempt to apply Bible authority to the local church it is not difficult to find how we can work together in a local church.

B. When one generation refuses to apply Bible authority to the work and organization of a local church, then it is not surprising to see the next generation reject the application of Bible authority in its entirety!