

Each local church functions collectively in a manner distinct from the individual activities of its own members (1 Timothy 5:16), by the planned use of its own resources, which it

possesses as the result of the first day of the week collection of its members (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The church has neither the obligation nor the right to do everything the individual may do (1 Timothy 5:16).

Each congregation, when mature, has “bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). Bishops (overseers) are also called elders (presbyters, older men) and pastors (shepherds) (Acts 20:17,28; 14:23). Deacons (servants) are to serve the church. Saints (holy ones, disciples, members) are to work together (Romans 12:4-8). Each congregation has the right to support evangelists (messengers of good), also called “preachers” (heralds, those who proclaim), to work either with the church that supports them or in other places (Philippians 4:15-16) to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

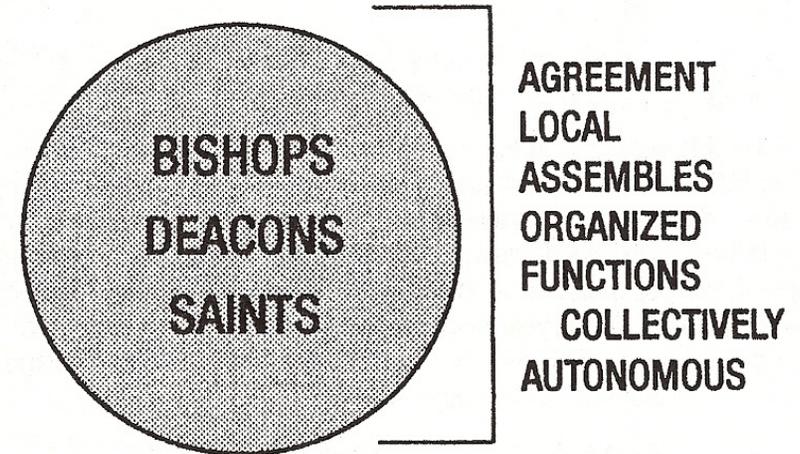
Finally, each local congregation is to be independent or autonomous of every other local church or any organization begun by human design. Each local church is to do all its own work under the oversight of its own elders (1 Peter 5:1-2). No eldership has the right to oversee any part of the work of any congregation except the one where they are members. No church is authorized to turn any part of its work over to the oversight of the elders of another congregation.

No church-supported human organization (an organization begun by human authority) can be scripturally made to fit this pattern. They are wrong in at least six ways.

*They are additions to the pattern (2 John 9).

*They are substitutions for the divinely authorized pattern (Isaiah 55:8-9).

LOCAL CONGREGATION



- *They presume to improve the divine plan for church organization (Romans 11:33-36; Jeremiah 10:23).
- *They usurp divine authority (Ephesians 1:22-23).
- *They violate the principle of walking by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17).
- *They pervert the function of the congregation into simply a fund-raising organization and thus rob it of its strength (Ephesians 4:12-16).

There is a divine pattern for the organization of the church, and we must not violate that pattern (2 Timothy 1:13). Let us return to the “old paths” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Questions for Review

I. True/False

1. ____ There is no divine pattern for the organization of the church.
2. ____ The universal church has no earthly function or organization.
3. ____ The only way Christians universally have fellowship is as each Christian has fellowship with the Head in obedience to His will.

Bible Correspondence Course
Lesson Twenty-three
The Organization of the Church

4. ____ The local congregation is the only earthly organization the Lord has authorized for His church.
5. ____ The church may do everything the individual may do.
6. ____ Each congregation, when mature, has elders to oversee the church and deacons to serve the church.
7. ____ Each local church is to do all its own work under the oversight of its own elders.
8. ____ A church may support a preacher or preachers to work either with the church that supports them or in other places.
9. ____ The elders of one local church may oversee the work or part of the work of another congregation or congregations.
10. ____ Congregations may support from their treasuries organizations of human design.

II. Matching

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| 1. ____ organization | A. shepherds |
| 2. ____ universal church | B. overseers |
| 3. ____ fellowship | C. messengers of good |
| 4. ____ bishops | D. a group of people who work together in a structured way for a shared purpose |
| 5. ____ elders | E. servants |
| 6. ____ pastors | F. sharing in work and blessings |
| 7. ____ deacons | G. heralds, those who proclaim |
| 8. ____ saints | H. the body of all the saved people in all the world, both living and dead |
| 9. ____ evangelists | I. holy ones, disciples, members |
| 10. ____ preachers | J. older men |

The New Testament contains a divine pattern for the church which we must carefully maintain (2 Timothy 1:13). In this lesson we will study the New Testament pattern for the organization of the church.

The term “organization” denotes “a group of people who work together in a structured way for a shared purpose” (**Cambridge**). An organized group of people has three qualities: oversight, pooled resources (a treasury) and a common work.

Universal Church

The universal church is that entity which Jesus promised to and did build (Matthew 16: 18). It is the body of all the saved people in all the world, both living and dead (Ephesians 5:23), in that all those who are saved by the Gospel are also added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). There is only one such body (Ephesians 4:4).

This body has only one Head, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18), and all the parts (members) of the body are to function individually as the Head instructs (Colossians 3:17).

The only means revealed in the Scriptures that Christians universally have fellowship (sharing in work and blessings) is as each member (Christian) has fellowship with the Head in obedience to His will (cf. 1 John 1:3,7). This means that Christians on a world-wide scale simply function as individuals rather than being bound together in some ecclesiastical machinery on this earth. The universal church has no divinely authorized organization or function upon this earth.

Local Church

Disciples in a locality should band together to become a local church or congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2). The local congregation is the only earthly organization the Lord has authorized for His church. Congregations have six characteristics revealed in the New Testament. They are composed of disciples of Christ who agree to work together (Acts 9:26-28) in a certain locality (1 Corinthians 1:2) and to assemble to worship on a regular basis (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 11:18).