

# God's All-Sufficient Church #1

**Introduction.** A lot of members of the Lord's church may wonder if issues like institutionalism and church cooperation are still even worth discussing anymore, but I can assure you they are relevant. Many brethren who move to Lufkin choose to attend one of the four congregations (of which I'm aware) that support these activities. We have people who visit with us and then leave to go to these groups.

So institutionalism has become epidemic not only within denominations but also within our own brotherhood. We want to know if it is right for organizations, separate from the church, designed and established by the will and wisdom of men and controlled by human authority, to do the work of the church.

Every Christian ought to know the answer to the question, "Can churches of Christ establish organizations and maintain them with money from the Lord's treasury as a means of doing its work?" We will then consider how congregations did their work in New Testament times, using the principle found in 1 Corinthians 14:33.

## ***I. The Church And Human Organizations***

- A. The Lord's church is a huge contrast to human organizations.
  - 1. The church is a divine organization for several reasons.
    - a) It was designed by divine wisdom, fulfills a divine purpose, and is built on a divine foundation (Matthew 16:16-19; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 3:10-11).
    - b) It is made up of saved men and women redeemed by the blood of Christ and added together by God (Acts 2:47; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 5:25-27).
    - c) It is ruled by divine authority (Ephesians 1:22-23).
    - d) It has a divine plan or arrangement and has been given a divine mission to accomplish (1 Corinthians 12:18-28; Ephesians 4:11-12).
    - e) It recognizes the New Testament as the only rule of faith and practice (Hebrews 9:15-17; 10:9-10, 19-22).
  - 2. No human organization possesses any of the above characteristics.
- B. God gave His church organizational form to govern its function.
  - 1. The local church is the only organization or government God gave to His church and each congregation is subject to the will of Christ (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
  - 2. The line of distinction has been drawn by divine will between what is human in origin and what is divine whether in matters of faith, worship, or organization (Matthew 15:1-14; 16:13-20; 21:23-27).
  - 3. Our building for God must agree with the divine pattern (Psalm 127:1; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11; Hebrews 8:5).
  - 4. The pattern of the church's doctrine, worship, and work is the same in all congregations (1 Corinthians 4:16-17; Philippians 4:9; 2 Timothy 1:13).
- C. No New Testament church ever supported a human organization.
  - 1. The Lord never gave the church authority to build anything but the church. Many today believe that authority for the church to build and maintain human

institutions is as inherent within its structure as the federal government's authority to build and maintain the postal service. However, the basic fallacy here is that Jesus Christ is head over His church and it has no right to build anything that He has not authorized it to build.

2. When the church today preaches the same gospel preached by the church in New Testament times, it will build only the church as it did then free from all human institutions and arrangements. There is no trace of their existence in the New Testament scriptures to do any work of the church; therefore, there is no authority for them now.
- D. New Testament churches were sufficient in carrying out their work.
1. Each church had its own organization through which to function (Philippians 1:1).
  2. Each congregation raised its own funds by the contributions of its members (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
  3. Each congregation supported evangelists to preach the gospel according to its ability as the Lord ordained (1 Corinthians 9:14; 2 Corinthians 11:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8).
  4. Each congregation was edified through the strength supplied by its own members (1 Corinthians 12:22-27; 14:26; Ephesians 4:14-16), and churches sent preachers to strengthen, edify, and help weak churches (Acts 11:22-24).
  5. Congregations provided for their own needy (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6).
  6. Churches cooperated with other churches who had a greater need among their own members than they could supply by sending money to the elders of such church through selected messengers (Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9).
  7. Each congregation carried on its own work through the organization God gave it. There is not an instance in the scriptures where churches of Christ ever used any human organization as a medium through which to function in doing its work. No one can find anything that God gave the church to do that cannot be done through the divinely ordained local congregations.
- E. Scriptural objections to human organizations doing the work of the church.
1. Human organizations that are used to do the Lord's work reflect on the wisdom of God.
    - a) Since the Lord's church has been designed by the wisdom of God, it is sufficient to accomplish His purposes.
    - b) When men build human organizations as an aid or substitute for God's organization they demonstrate their lack of faith in the sufficiency of what God has provided. We have the same right to write a chapter and add it to the Bible as to build or support a nursing home from the church treasury.
  2. Human organizations supplant the church, usurp the functions God gave it, and ignore the divine pattern.
  3. Human organizations rob the church of the strength that would be received by its proper functioning. These activities leave the congregation only the privilege of worship and raising money to subsidize the human institutions that are doing its work.

4. Human organizations to do the work of the church or as a medium of cooperation for the churches are without authority and are therefore sinful because they violate the principle of walking by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

## **II. How New Testament Churches Did Their Work**

- A. One church cooperated and helped other churches in time of emergency.
  1. The church in Antioch contributed to needs of the brethren in Judea in a time of famine (Acts 11:27-30).
  2. How did Antioch carry out the cooperation with these “brethren in Judea”?
    - a) The money was raised by the disciples in Antioch contributing “every man according to his ability.” Since the disciples in Antioch constituted the church and since they contributed into a common fund (joint action), it is only reasonable to conclude that this was congregational activity.
    - b) Paul and Barnabas were chosen by these disciples as messengers to take these funds to the “brethren which dwelt in Judea.”
    - c) These funds were delivered to the “elders” among the “brethren in Judea.”
      - (1) Elders were congregational officers who were qualified men chosen from among the congregation (Acts 6:2-3; 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-9; Titus 1:6-9).
      - (2) Since the “brethren in Judea” constituted several congregations (Galatians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:14), the funds were delivered by the messengers into the hands of the elders of every congregation where there was a need and they distributed those funds.
- B. Many churches cooperated and helped one church in time of emergency.
  1. We do not know what brought about this need, which was different than the first benevolent need we studied.
  2. Gentile churches to whom the gospel had gone out from Jerusalem were called on to reciprocate by sending to their need (Romans 15:25-28).
    - a) Thus Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia contributed after instruction from Paul (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9).
    - b) The Corinthian brethren had been the first to make a “beginning a year ago” when they had been stirred to do so by Titus (2 Corinthians 8:6-10).
  3. Paul exhorted Titus to go ahead of the rest into Achaia, taking with him “the brother” and “our brother” (2 Corinthians 8:18-23).
    - a) These other brethren had been selected by the churches to travel with the group as their messengers to take their contribution to Jerusalem.
    - b) However, Paul had sent them beforehand into Achaia and he wrote the Corinthians urging that with the help of these brethren they get their previously promised offering ready so that his boasting of their readiness would not be in vain (2 Corinthians 9:1-5).
  4. Each church raised its own funds by each of its members contributing their part on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). By contributing when they had “come together,” they collected the money in a common fund.
  5. Each church, acting independently, chose its own messenger to entrust with its contribution that would be taken to Jerusalem.

- a) Several churches may have approved the same messenger but each church had the responsibility of choosing its own (1 Corinthians 16:3-4).
  - b) Each church entrusted their contribution to their own selected agent or messenger and he became responsible to them and the Lord for faithfully delivering it to Jerusalem. There is not the slightest hint of these separate contributions losing their identity in a “pooled” or “combined” fund. This was concurrent but independent action by each church and is a binding New Testament pattern.
  - c) No church sent its money through another church. There was no “sponsoring” church to receive or forward the funds. All the churches who had a part in this contribution for Jerusalem sustained an equal relationship to the work being done. It was not a created need or a promoted work which they had undertaken and were unable to discharge.
6. In the absence of any information to the contrary, we are forced to conclude that these messengers, including Paul, brought funds from these various churches to Jerusalem and delivered it into the hands of the elders of the church (Acts 11:27-30).
- C. Churches cooperated in supporting Paul while he preached.
- 1. Paul took wages from other churches and Philippi was among the churches that supported him (2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 1:3-5).
    - a) The Philippian church sent directly to Paul by their individual messenger Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25; 4:15-18).
    - b) This constitutes a New Testament pattern. It authorized only the “direct” method and excludes the “indirect” method.
  - 2. In both evangelism and benevolence, the local church raised its funds, selected its messenger, and sent directly to the work being done.
    - a) Where is the passage setting forth either command, example, or inference that any New Testament church ever sent a contribution through another church to be forwarded to the work being done?
    - b) Where is the command, example, or inference authorizing many churches to pool their funds, combining them and centralizing their control under one eldership for the purpose of “promoting a good work”?

**Conclusion.** Since God has given by divine wisdom an organization to the church, the local congregation, and has made it sufficient to accomplish His purpose, it is the only medium of work and worship through which the Christian can accomplish His purpose and we must be satisfied with His will, His way, and His word.

The New Testament scriptures furnish us a complete pattern for congregational cooperation. The practice of a church “promoting a good work” and soliciting funds from other churches to pay for it is unknown to the New Testament. The practice of one church “sponsoring” a work and many churches combining their funds and centralizing the control over those funds in one church and under one eldership cannot be found in the scriptures and hence has no divine authority but is a perversion of God’s plan.