

Let the Church Be the Church

Ephesians 3:10-11

I. INTRODUCTION: I

- A. **2** The church as planned by God and built by Christ is perfect in every way (Eph. 5:27).
 - (1) It is all sufficient and fully capable, without any add-ons, of doing all the Lord requires of it.
 - (2) Man is never satisfied and is always tinkering with the church (e.g., 43,000+ denominations!).
- B. God planned the church before time began (Eph. 3:10-11) and designed it to fulfill His divine purpose (Col. 1:21-22; Eph. 5:23; Acts 2:47; not a glorified social club!).
- C. **3** God also gave the church (in the local sense) certain work to do:
 - (1) Evangelism: Spreading the gospel message (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Thess. 1:6-8; Phil. 4:15-16).
 - (2) Edification: Building up the saints in the faith (Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:15-16).
 - (3) Benevolence: Ltd. to “needy saints” (Acts 4:34-35; 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rom. 15:25-26).
- D. The church is to be “*subject to Christ*” (Eph. 5:25-26; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Matt. 28:18)
- E. Therefore, we need to keep our hands off the church and **4** **Let the Church Be the Church** and not involve her in things Christ does not authorize!
 - (1) **5** When we involve the church in things not authorized by Christ it is just as wrong as using instruments of music in worship or Pepsi-Cola and ham sandwiches at the Lord’s table. (BTW: I love instrumental music, but it’s not authorized!)
 - (2) When we involve the church in things not authorized by Christ, we transgress and do not “*abide in the doctrine of Christ*” and we do not “*have God*” (2 Jn. 9).
 - (3) Our intentions do not matter! What matters is doing God’s will (**Matt. 7:21-23**: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*”).

II. DISCUSSION:

We are not letting the church be the church when we involve it in formulating...

I. **6** A new hermeneutic.

- A. The church is the “*pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15) with a divine, not human, mission (Mk. 16:15; **1 Thess. 1:8**: “*For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.*”).
 - (1) But the church is not the source of truth (e.g., Catholic magisterium; 2 Jn. 9).
 - (2) Nor, is it the church’s job to formulate a *new hermeneutic*.
- B. What is hermeneutics? Hermeneutics has to do with how we interpret the Bible.
 - (1) Dictionary.com: “the branch of theology that deals with the principles of Biblical exegesis.”
 - (2) In other words, hermeneutics are the principles one uses to guide them as they seek to interpret and apply the Bible (The science of interpreting any human communication, for that matter.).

C. ** Using the proper hermeneutic is essential for us to correctly establish Bible authority (i.e., hermeneutics) for what we teach and practice (**2 Tim. 2:15**: "...present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." NIV).

(1) There are only two sources of authority when it comes to the Christ's religion:

(2) Heaven or men: Matt. 21:23-27

☛ Heaven: Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11; ("what saith the Scriptures"; Rom. 4:3; 10:8; 11:4; Gal. 4:30; "it is written" (80 times); e.g., Matt. 4:1-11).

☛ Men: Matt. 15:9; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12; Matt. 4:4

(3) **7** Not important? Just ask: ("As long as I'm sincere!")

☛ Nadab and Abihu: **Lev. 10:1-2**: "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."; Lev. 16:12

☛ Uzzah: **2 Sam. 6:6-7**: "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. 7 Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God."; Ex. 37:1-9; Num. 4:1-15; **1 Chron. 15:13**: "For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order."

☛ Moses: **Num. 20:8**: "Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water;"; **Num. 20:12**: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"

☛ Judaizers: **Gal. 5:4**: "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

D. **8** Bible authority is established by this hermeneutic: (e.g., Gospel includes the Gentiles)

(1) Direct command: Acts 15:13-20 (**vv. 16-17**: "After! this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; 17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name," says the LORD who does all these things.").

(2) Approved example: Acts 15:12 (Paul's work with the Gentiles)

(3) Necessary conclusion: Acts 15:8-11 (Holy Spirit to Cornelius)

(4) Silence of the Scriptures: **Heb. 7:12-14**: "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood."

E. This is too restrictive for some and so they cry for a new way of looking at the Bible so they can do what they want to do (rather than what the Lord wants us to do!).

F. If it was good enough for brethren in the first century, it is good enough for us today!

G. ** We must do what the Lord says! 1 Pet. 4:11 (Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19; 1 Cor. 2:9-10)

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2. **9** A missionary society to preach the gospel for us:

A. Brief history of the missionary society.

(1) *American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS)*: an organization formed in 1849, separate and apart from the churches, with the mission of spreading the gospel.

(2) Supported by donations from the churches of Christ.

B. It performed the work God gave the church to do! *Evangelism*

(1) The church is “...*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15), not the miss. society.

(2) The church at Thessalonica is exemplary in that they “... *sounded out the word of the Lord...*” (1 Thess. 1:8), they didn’t hire a manmade institution to do their work.

(3) Neither did the church at Philippi send a contribution to a missionary society:

Phil. 4:15-17: “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. I 6 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”

(4) The Lord’s church was so successful, without other agencies (e.g., ACMS), in spreading the gospel, that, in a very short period of time, Paul could say, “...*the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven...*” (Col. 1:23).

C. Am I against evangelism because I do not believe it is scriptural for the church to support the missionary society?

(1) No! Just like I’m not against instrumental music as long as it’s not used in worship (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

(2) Just like I’m not against Pepsi-Cola and ham sandwiches as long as they are not used at the Lord’s table (1 Cor. 11:23-25).

D. ****** The church didn’t need a missionary society then, and we don’t need one today!

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3. **10** Benevolent institutions to relieve our needy: e.g., indigent saints, widows, orphans

A. The New Testament pattern limited the church of relieving the needs of “saints only”:

(1) Pentecost: Acts 4:34-35 (“needy person among them”).

(2) Grecian widows: Acts 6 (“their (Hellenist Christians) widows”).

(3) The great famine: Acts 11:27-30 (“for the relief of the brethren living in Judea”).

(4) Collection at Corinth: 1 Cor. 16:1-2 (“collection for the saints”).

(5) Jerusalem: Rom. 15:25-26 (“the poor among the saints in Jerusalem”).

B. **11** Does NOT mean we don’t have a benevolent responsibility as individual Christians.

(1) To all men: If there is a need and we have the means and opportunity, we have the responsibility as individual Christians to “do good until all men” (Gal. 6:10).

(2) To our brethren: **1 Jn. 3:17:** “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

(3) To orphans and widows: **Jas. 1:27:** “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

C. Discharging of our ind. benev. responsibilities is an aspect of our judgment! Matt. 25:31-46

- D. Failure to recognize our individual benevolent responsibilities is a fallacy brought on when the church involves itself in general benevolence (i.e., “I did my part when I put my money in the collection plate.” Not true!).
- E. **12** Some churches of Christ turn over their work of benevolence to an institution of some kind to relieve needy saints (e.g., orphan homes, old-age homes).
 - (1) Remember: the church has limited benevolent responsibilities (**1 Tim. 5:16**: “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”). See point A.
 - (2) We are obligated to follow the NT pattern for using the church’s funds in benevolence.
- F. In the NT when a church had a need greater than its ability to relieve, other churches with the ability to help, sent to the elders of the church in need (Acts 11:27-30).
- G. Some churches of Christ that wouldn’t think of not following the NT pattern in worship (i.e., edification) sadly do not follow the NT pattern for evangelism and/or benevolence?
- H. Someone says: “If we don’t form a separate institution to do the work, it won’t get done!”
 - (1) Shame on us if we can’t do the work the way God told us to do it! Follow the NT!
 - (2) That claim is just false! e.g., Philippine typhoon relief (i.e., call for donations from saints had to be stopped because there was plenty to relieve the need.).
- I. Am I against taking care of orphans (“orphan hater”) because I do not believe it is scriptural for the church to support an orphan home? “orphan hater”
 - (1) No! Just like I’m not against instrumental music as long as it’s not used in worship (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).
 - (2) Just like I’m not against Pepsi-Cola and ham sandwiches as long as they are not used at the Lord’s table (1 Cor. 11:23-25).
- J. The church in the first century did not need another institution to do this work; neither do we! cf. Jas. 1:27

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4. 13 A college to edify our members:

- A. Some churches of Christ send funds from their treasury to support colleges involved in secular education like *Abilene Christian University* (Abilene, TX), *Freed-Hardeman University* (Henderson, TN), *Harding University* (Searcy, AR), *Lipscomb* (Nashville, TN) and others.
- B. Am I against Christians getting a secular education (i.e., three R’s, etc.) because I do not believe it is scriptural for the church to support a “Christian College”?
 - (1) No! Just look at my educational background to know that is not true.
 - (2) Secular education is important! But that is not a work of the church.
 - (3) I’m no more against secular education than I’m against instrumental music as long as the church isn’t involved in it.
- C. Paul wrote about the church, that it edifies, “*itself in love*” (Eph. 4:16).
 - (1) That word “*edifying*” refers to a spiritual “building up.”
 - (2) This spiritual edification is done by the church through the teaching of God’s Word (**Acts 20:32**: “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to

build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Paul did this work of spiritual edification “for three years” with the church at Ephesus; Acts 20:31).

- (3) Where in the NT is authority for the church to send \$\$ from its treasury to a college?
- (4) The church didn’t do it in the first century and neither should we do it today!
- D. I believe it is entirely scriptural for individual Christians to band together, pool their funds and support such educational institutions on their own; but don’t make it a work of the church! That’s involving the church in something God never intended it to do.

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5. 14 A kitchen or “Fellowship Hall” in which to eat and drink:

(It’s a lesson for another time, but eating and drinking are not New Testament fellowship! We are in our fellowship hall right now as we have fellowship with one another and God! As we worship Him in song, prayer, preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and giving of our means.)

A. Why? We have houses to eat and drink in.

- (1) Paul asked the Corinthians, “*What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God...*” (1 Cor. 11:22).
- (2) He went on to add, “*...if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home...*” (1 Cor. 11:34).
- (3) That’s exactly what first century Christians in Jerusalem did as they were, “*... breaking bread from house to house...*” (Acts 2:46).

B. Social meals are the responsibility of the home, not the church!

C. Am I against Christians eating social meals together? No!

D. 15 We need an understanding of generic versus specific Bible authority.

- (1) Generic: “*Make yourself an ark...*” (Gen. 6:14a).
- (2) Specific: “*Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. 15 And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.*” (Gen. 6:14-16)

E. ** God specifically told Noah concerning:

- (1) Materials: gopher wood, pitch
- (2) Dimensions: 300 cubits (length) X 50 cubits (width) X 30 cubits (height)
- (3) Layout: a window, a door in its side, 3 decks

F. God didn’t tell Noah the tools to use; thus, to obey the general command to “*make yourself an ark*” he could use any tools he desired as long as he specifically followed the other instructions.

G. 16 Example: **Mk. 16:15**: “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*”

- (1) General: “*Go...preach...*”
- (2) Specific: “*preach the gospel*” (Not teach math or dig wells, specifically preach the gospel.).
 - (a) ** How to “go” not specified: walk, ride a horse, drive a car, fly in an airplane.
 - (b) How to “preach” not specified: speak, write, use a chalk board, powerpoint, etc.

(c) But, what to “preach” is specified! “the gospel”

H. **17** Here’s my point as it concerns the use of our meeting house:

- (1) General: **Heb. 10:25**: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”
 - (2) Specific: **Acts 20:7**: “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...”; 1 Cor. 16:1-2 (also, other days of week, e.g., gospel meetings)
 - (a) ****** We have generic authority to assemble. The general command to assemble gives us the authority to provide a place to assemble: rented room, brush arbor, bldg, etc.
 - (b) We have specific authority as to what we are to do when we assemble: worship (pray, preach, Lord’s supper, collection, sing).
 - (c) But we have no authority, either general or specific, to use the building for anything else (i.e., social meals, bingo, basketball, home financial management classes, etc.).
- I. If we use the church building for a purpose not authorized by God’s Word it is no different than using Pepsi-Cola or ham sandwiches at the Lord’s table.

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6. **18** Gimmicks to attract and draw people:

- A. Many churches today have all kinds of schemes and tricks to get people in their doors (relate experience in Michigan).
- B. We don’t need such. We are to offer the same thing as the church in the New Testament: “...Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).
- C. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (Jn. 12:32).
- D. How does He do this? The gospel! The gospel is God’s calling card!

Jn. 6:44-45: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”

2 Thess. 2:13-14: “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”; recall 1 Thess. 1:6-8

Rom. 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

- E. When men use food, fun and frolic to draw people they are drawn to that not the gospel!

Jn. 6:26-27: “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you...”

- F. Also, I’ve had several people call me asking, “What activities do you have for the children?”

- (1) What they are really asking is what kind of sports, games, camps, amusement park trips, etc. do you have for the kids.
- (2) I’m not opposed to kids playing ball or going to Cedar Point, King’s Island or a camp; but none of that is the work of the church.

(3) It is also an insult to our youth, and to the Lord, to think they need some carnal approach to lure them into obeying the gospel.

G. ** One old-time preacher said this about using such things to draw people: “A church that uses fried chicken, iced tea and ice cream to draw people is as cold as the cream, as weak as the tea and as dead as the chicken.”

III. CONCLUSION: 19

1. Thank you for being such a patient and attentive audience.
2. I urge you to “search the Scriptures” to see if these things are not so (Acts 17:11; Lk. 8:15).
 - A. If they are so, then I exhort you to follow them.
 - B. If they are not so, please bring it to my attention so I can conform my beliefs and practices to God’s Word.
3. God purposed the church before time began (Eph. 3:10-11) and has given it the glorious three-fold mission of evangelism, edification, and benevolence to needy saints.
4. Let’s keep our hands off the church and let it do what God intended.
5. Let the church be the church!

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