

Challenges Confronting The Church



Challenges That Confront Local Churches Of Christ

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Challenges Confronting The Church

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Challenges Confronting The Church

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

1. The church in the first century often experienced grave challenges...
 - a. Persecution - **Ac 8:1-3; 9:1-2**
 - b. False teachers - **Ac 15:1-2; 2Pe 2:1-3; Re 2:14,20**
 - c. Apostasy - **Ac 20:29-31; 1Ti 4:1-3; Jude 3**
2. Today we see similar challenges confronting the church...
 - a. False teachers leading many astray
 - b. Churches apostatizing, resulting in new religious organizations
 - c. With more than 38,000 denominations now existing!
3. In this series of lessons, I would like for us to examine challenges we face today...
 - a. Certainly not every challenge, for there are many
 - b. But a few of the more common ones faced by many churches of Christ

[**But first**, it might be helpful to carefully distinguish between **the universal church** and **local church** as revealed in the Bible. Let's begin with describing...]

I. THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

A. COMPOSED OF ALL CHRISTIANS...

1. The church to which Jesus referred in **Mt 16:18**
2. Made up all the saved, both living and dead - cf. **He 12:22-24**

B. THERE IS JUST ONE...

1. The universal church is called the "body" of Christ - **Ep 1:22-23**
2. There is only "one body"; therefore, only one church! - **Ep 4:4**

C. BEGAN ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST...

1. In Jerusalem, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ - **Ac 2:1-47**
2. As Peter later referred to this day, it was the "beginning" - cf. **Ac 11:15**

D. ENTER ONLY BY BEING ADDED BY THE LORD...

1. One cannot "join" the church by their own volition
2. Rather, they are "added" by the Lord Himself when saved - **Ac 2:41,47**

E. THE LORD KEEPS THE BOOKS OF MEMBERSHIP...

1. There is no agency on earth that keeps the registry of true members
2. Enrollment is in heaven; only the Lord knows those who are truly His - **He 12:23; 2Ti 2:19**

F. CONSISTS OF ALL THE SAVED...

1. The Lord is presenting to Himself a church holy and without blemish - cf. **Ep 5:25-27**
2. Individuals in the church who sin and refuse to repent are "cut off", "cast out", "spewed out"

- cf. **Jn 15:2,6; Ro 11:19-22; Re 3:16**

G. MUST BE IN THIS CHURCH TO BE SAVED...

1. For the Lord is the Savior of the body (which is His church) - **Ep 5:23**
2. Since the Lord adds one to His church when they are saved, one cannot be saved and not be in the church universal!

H. HAS NO EARTHLY ORGANIZATION...

1. The church universal does have organization - cf. **Ep 2:19-22; 1Pe 2:5**
 - a. What organization exists is spiritual in nature
 - b. Christ is the cornerstone, together with His apostles and prophets as the foundation
 - c. All Christians are “living stones” built upon that foundation
2. But there is no earthly headquarters for the church
 - a. E.g., no telephone number to call to speak with the “head” of the church
 - b. For the Head and His headquarters are in heaven!

I. CANNOT BE DIVIDED...

1. For there is no earthly organization to divide!
2. If division appears to exist...
 - a. Some unscriptural organization of churches must have been created
 - b. Such organizations can have division, but not the Lord’s church universal!
3. Those who would seek to divide the church through doctrine, conduct, etc., are simply cut off by the Lord Himself!
 - a. As seen before, individual Christians are “cut off”, “cast out”, “spewed out”
 - b. Local churches can have their “candlestick removed” - cf. **Re 2:5**
 - c. We need to make sure we are remaining faithful to be in it!
4. Thus there is and always will be, “one body”! - **Ep 4:4**
 - a. Death cannot prevail against it - **Mt 16:18**
 - b. It is a kingdom that will last forever - cf. **Dan 2:44; Lk 1:32-33; Re 17:14**

J. DEATH DOESN’T AFFECT MEMBERSHIP...

1. The church universal is made up of the saved, both living and dead - **He 12:22-23**
2. When one dies, they are still with Christ! - **Php 1:21-23; 1Th 5:10**

K. DOES NOT HAVE ONE OFFICIAL NAME...

1. No one exclusive name or term is used to describe the universal church
2. Various terms used include church of God, body, kingdom, etc. - **1Co 10:32; Ep 1:22-23; Col 1:13**

[Such are some of the defining characteristics of the church universal. In contrast, consider...]

II. THE CHURCH LOCAL

A. COMPOSED OF CHRISTIANS IN ONE LOCATION...

1. A local church is made up of Christians in one geographical area
2. E.g., the church at Corinth, the church of the Thessalonians - **1Co 1:2; 1Th 1:1**
-- **In contrast, the church universal is made up of Christians everywhere!**

B. THERE ARE MANY CHURCHES...

1. Paul had reference to local churches when he wrote **Ro 16:16**
 2. And again when he wrote **Ga 1:2**
- **When it comes to the church universal, though, there is just one!**

C. BEGINS WHEREVER PEOPLE JOIN TOGETHER...

1. As the gospel spreads and people respond to it, those in a particular area start a local church when they agree to work together as one
 2. Just as the church in Antioch began later than the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 11:19-26**
- **Whereas the church universal began in Jerusalem on Pentecost, local churches have begun at different places and different times!**

D. ENTER BY JOINING OURSELVES...

1. When one wishes to become an accepted member of the local church, they must “join themselves” to that church
 2. As Paul sought to do when he came to the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 9:26-28**
- **Whereas one is “added” by the Lord Himself to the universal church, we can seek to “join” a local congregation (if its members are willing to accept us)**

E. ENROLLED BY HUMAN JUDGMENT...

1. Whether we are accepted into a local church is a decision made by the leaders or members of that church
 2. Sometimes people are rejected when they should be received - **3Jn 5-9**
 3. Other times they are accepted when they should be removed - **1Co 5:1-13**
- **Evil men may succeed in kicking one out of a local church, but only the Lord determines who stays in the universal church!**

F. CONSISTS OF BOTH SAVED AND LOST...

1. Since enrollment occurs through human judgment, fallible decisions can be made
 2. A local church may therefore have some who are Christians in name only - cf. **Re 3:1-4**
- **Hypocrites may become members of a local church; but they don't sneak by the Lord to become members of the universal church!**

G. DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO BE SAVED...

1. One can be saved, and not belong to any local church
 2. Such was the case of the Eunuch immediately following his conversion, and of Paul when he was in transit between Antioch and Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 8:39; 9:26**
- **Of course, this should be temporary; in the universal church, it is impossible!**

H. HAS EARTHLY ORGANIZATION...

1. A local church when scripturally organized will have bishops and deacons - **Php 1:1**
 2. These bishops were also called elders and pastors, whose role was to oversee and feed the local congregation - **Ac 14:23; 20:17,28**
- **The only role or position ever given men over the universal church on earth was the apostles and they were not replaced when they died - e.g., James in Ac 12:2**

I. CAN BE DIVIDED...

1. Local churches can easily be divided over doctrine or personalities
 2. Such was the case with the church at Corinth - **1Co 1:10-13; 3:3,4**
- **While we can't divide the universal church, we can be responsible for dividing local**

churches!

J. DEATH DOES AFFECT MEMBERSHIP...

1. When we die, our membership in a local congregation ends
2. When Stephen died, he was no longer a member of the Jerusalem church - **Ac 8:1-2**
-- **But our membership in the church universal continues on after death!**

K. MAY USE DIFFERENT SCRIPTURAL NAMES...

1. Showing relationship to God or Christ - **1Co 1:2; Ro 16:16**
2. Identifying the location of the members - **1Th 1:1; 2Th 1:2**
-- **There is no one official name, but we should use scriptural names!**

CONCLUSION

1. Understanding the distinction between the church universal and local is **important...**
 - a. Failure to do so can lead to faulty thinking about the church
 - b. Failure to do so can make one susceptible to many challenges facing the church
2. Understanding the distinction between the church universal and local is **encouraging...**
 - a. Most challenges confronting the church today do not affect the church universal per se
 - b. Most challenges confronting the church today involve how local churches respond to them

The church of Christ universal is in good hands (those of Jesus Himself). Whether we remain in His church universal is greatly determined by how we face challenges that affect us as members of local churches of Christ!

The first challenge we shall examine may be the most important, for it determines how we respond to all other challenges we may confront: **Authority In Religion!**

Challenges Confronting The Church

Authority In Religion

INTRODUCTION

1. The Lord's church can expect to confront many challenges...
 - a. Opposition by Satan was foretold in the parable of the tares - **Mt 13:24-30,36-43**
 - b. Attacks from within and without foretold by Paul - **Ac 20:29-30**
 - c. Apostasy was foretold, and began very early - **2Pe 2:1-3; Jude 4**
2. Previously, we suggested that the local church will be at the front of the confrontation...
 - a. As the church universal is a spiritual entity well preserved by Jesus
 - b. But the church local is subject to many things that can threaten its existence
 - c. How can the church local stand strong and firm in the service of Christ?
3. I believe the key is respecting the proper authority...
 - a. How shall we determine what is right or wrong, good or evil?
 - b. What shall be our authority in matters of religion?
 - c. Is a particular doctrine or practice from heaven or from man? - cf. **Mt 21:23-25**

[Using the proper authority in matters of religion, most challenges confronting the church can be easily overcome. What is the proper authority in religion? Let's first consider...]

I. WHAT MANY CHURCHES ACCEPT AS AUTHORITY

A. THE OLD TESTAMENT...

1. From the beginning of the church, many have appealed to the OT - e.g., **Ac 15:1-5**
 2. The OT has its place, when properly handled - **Ro 15:4; 1Co 10:11; 2Ti 3:14-17**
 3. But it can be misused, to authorize things no longer required - **Ga 5:1-4; 1Ti 4:1-3**
- **We cannot assume that just because something is in the OT, it is authorized!**

B. TRADITIONS OF MEN...

1. The handing down of traditions was common in Rabbinic Judaism - e.g., **Mk 7:1-5**
 2. Traditions of God are not wrong - **1Co 11:2; 2Th 2:15; 3:6**
 3. But Jesus condemned the traditions of men...
 - a. When they are taught as doctrines of God - **Mk 7:6-7**
 - b. When they displace the commands of God - **Mk 7:8-13**
- **Uninspired traditions cannot be equated with or replacements for the Word of God!**

C. MODERN DAY PROPHETS...

1. Throughout church history, many have claimed to be prophets of God - e.g., **Re 2:20**
 2. Christ and His apostles warned against false prophets - **Mt 7:15; 2Pe 2:1; 1Jn 4:1**
 3. The OT gives us two ways to test the prophets
 - a. Do their prophecies come to pass? - **Deut 18:20-22**
 - b. Even if they do, is their doctrine consistent with God's Word? - **Deut 13:1-5**
- **Since the 1st century A.D., all "prophets" have failed either one or both tests!**

D. MAJORITY RULE...

1. Many people and church councils decide doctrine or practice based on majority rule
 2. Yet Jesus warned of the danger of following the majority - **Mt 7:13-14**
 3. If we had followed the majority...
 - a. In Noah's day, we would have perished in the flood
 - b. In Joshua's day, we would have perished in the wilderness
- **Following the majority is not a good guide for authority in religion!**

E. CONSCIENCE...

1. "Let your conscience be your guide" is the motto of many
 2. But our conscience cannot always be reliable
 - a. Paul had served God with a good conscience throughout his life - **Ac 23:1**
 - b. Even at a time when he was persecuting Christians! - cf. **Ac 26:9-11**
 3. The conscience is like a clock, which works properly only if set properly
- **Our conscience is not always a reliable guide in matters of religion**

F. HUMAN WISDOM...

1. Many feel that through their own wisdom they can determine right and wrong
 2. But God's thoughts and ways are not always our own - cf. **Isa 55:8-9**
 3. In fact, God has chosen to save man in a manner specifically designed to confound those who depend solely upon human wisdom - cf. **1Co 1:18-29**
 4. For us to know God's will, it was necessary for Him to reveal it to us - **1Co 2:9-12**
 5. This He has done through His Spirit-inspired apostles - **Ep 3:1-3**
 6. Who in turn shared it with us through their writings - **Ep 3:4-5**
- **Human wisdom is often the exact opposite of God's wisdom!**

G. FEELINGS...

1. This is often the standard of authority for many people and churches
 - a. Who go by whatever 'feels right'
 - b. Who place stock in a religion 'better felt than told'
 - c. Who will follow societal trends that may seem good and right
 2. Yet the Bible declares the danger of trusting in feelings
 - a. "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." - **Pr 14:12**
 - b. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..." - **Pr 28:26**
 - c. "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." - **Jer 10:23**
- **Such subjective feelings are from the heart of man, not the mind of God!**

[These seven "standards of authority in religion" are from men, not from heaven, and are the main reason for much religious confusion and division that exists today. Allow me to suggest...]

II. WHAT CHURCHES SHOULD ACCEPT AS AUTHORITY

A. THE WORDS OF JESUS CHRIST...

1. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth - **Mt 28:18**
 2. He expects us to observe all things whatsoever He commanded - **Mt 28:19-20**
 3. He is the head of the church, which is to be subject to Him - **Ep 5:23-24**
- **As the body of Christ, we must submit to our Head!**

B. THE DOCTRINE OF THE APOSTLES...

1. To receive Christ, we must receive His apostles - **Jn 13:20**
 2. They were sent as His ambassadors - **2Co 5:20**
 3. To ensure reliability, Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit - **Jn 14:26; 16:12-13**
 4. The apostles' wrote so that we might have their understanding - **Ep 3:1-5**
 5. They wrote their epistles that we might always be reminded - **2Pe 1:12-15; 3:1-2**
 6. Their writings were "the commandments of the Lord" - **1Co 14:37**
 7. They received their word as "the word of God" - **2Th 2:13**
 8. Thus the early church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" - **Ac 2:42**
- **Any true local church of Christ respects the doctrine of the apostles as their authority**

C. THE FAITH REVEALED ONCE FOR ALL...

1. The faith or doctrine of Christ was delivered "once for all time" (NLT) - **Jude 3**
 2. The apostles did not hesitate to proclaim the "whole counsel" of God - **Ac 20:27**
 3. They proclaimed "all things" pertaining to life and godliness - **2Pe 1:3**
 4. The Scriptures therefore provide everything needed to make one "complete" - **2Ti 3:16-17**
- **With the Scriptures as an all-sufficient guide, we need no other authority!**

CONCLUSION

1. The only proper authority in religion...
 - a. Is that which emanates from Jesus as the head of His church
 - b. Which has come to us through the doctrines of His Spirit-inspired apostles
 - c. Which has been preserved in the form of the New Testament
2. All other authority in religion comes from...
 - a. Either misapplication of the Scriptures (e.g., the Old Testament)
 - b. Or uninspired men (and women) who usurp authority based on feelings, etc.
3. When confronted with any challenge, the church today needs to...
 - a. Look to the words of Christ, and the writings of His apostles
 - b. Observe all things He commanded, and continue steadfastly in their doctrine

Our next study will examine a challenge that has confronted the church throughout its history:
Denominationalism!

Challenges Confronting The Church

Denominationalism

INTRODUCTION

1. A great challenge confronting the church is **denominationalism**...
 - a. According to one account, there are more than 38,000 different denominations!
 - b. Different religious organizations, bearing many different religious names
 - c. Hindering the spread of the gospel (“Why, you Christians can’t even agree!”)
2. Denominationalism confronted the church early on...
 - a. Many think that it started with the Protestant reformation (ca. 1517 AD)
 - b. Properly understood, its origins can be traced to the second century AD

[What is denominationalism? Why is it wrong? Such questions this study will address...]

I. DEFINING DENOMINATION AND DENOMINATIONALISM

A. WHAT IS A DENOMINATION...?

1. “A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.” - **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**
 3. By their common name and tie to a governing body above the local congregation, they are “denominated” from all congregations that do not submit to the same authority
 4. Some examples:
 - a. **The Roman Catholic Church** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the pope in Rome
 - b. **The Eastern Orthodox Church** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the patriarch of Constantinople
 - c. **The Anglican Church of England** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the archbishop of Canterbury
 - d. **The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)** is made up of those churches that submit to the synod in Missouri
- **A denomination is a group of congregations that are joined together under some governing body, all wearing the same distinctive name**

B. WHAT IS DENOMINATIONALISM...?

1. According to **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**:
 - a. “The tendency to separate into religious denominations”
 - b. “Advocacy of separation into religious denominations”
 - c. “Strict adherence to a denomination; sectarianism”
2. For the purpose in this series, I will be applying the term to any approval of the denominational division which exists today
 - a. Many in denominations today are not all that devoted to their denominational principles or interests
 - b. But by membership in a denomination they implicitly advocate separation into religious denominations

[Is denominationalism really a challenge confronting the church? Some consider it a blessing: e.g., “Join the church of your choice!” But from a Biblical perspective, consider...]

II. WHY DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG

A. IT IS UN-SCRIPTURAL...

1. That is, it is without Scriptural support
 - a. There is no basis in the Bible for local churches being divided up into various denominational bodies
 - b. There is no denomination that can go to the Bible and say, “See that passage? There is our church (denomination)!”
 2. In the New Testament...
 - a. Local congregations were independent, autonomous (self-governing)
 - b. Church organization was limited to within the local congregation
 - c. With elders (also known as pastors, bishops, overseers, presbyters) appointed to oversee only the congregation of which they were members - cf. **Ac 20:17,28; 1Pe 5:1-2**
 3. The only authority above the local church in the NT was Christ and His apostles
 - a. Once the church began, apostles were not replaced after they died - e.g., **Ac 12:1-2**
 - b. But through the Word of God, the authority of Christ and His apostles continues
- **Individuals, synods, conferences, etc., that presume to usurp authority over local churches today do so without Scriptural authority**

B. IT IS ANTI-SCRIPTURAL...

1. Not only is it without scriptural support, it is contrary to what the Bible teaches
 2. It is contrary to the prayer of Jesus for unity among His believers - **Jn 17:20-23**
 3. It is condemned by Paul in his epistle to the church at Corinth
 - a. There are to be no divisions among believers - **1Co 1:10-13**
 - b. Sectarianism is a sign of carnality - **1Co 3:3-4**
 4. It opposes the efforts of Christ on the cross! - **Ep 2:14-16**
 - a. Jesus died to break down the wall of division
 - b. Jesus died to reconcile man to God in ONE body
- **Just as our sin works against the efforts of Christ on the cross (for He died to put away sin), so does denominational division!**

C. IT IS HARMFUL TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST...

1. Jesus knew that unity among His disciples would be “the final apologetic”
 - a. Cf. “that the world may believe” - **Jn 17:21**
 - b. In view of Jesus’ words, we should not be surprised when unbelievers are slow to accept the gospel coming from a divided church
 2. Many point to the divided condition of those professing to follow Christ...
 - a. Atheists and agnostics use religious division as an excuse not to believe in God
 - b. Muslims, Jews, etc. often use denominationalism reasons not to believe in Christ
 3. Denominationalism has also given support and encouragement to the cults
 - a. Mormonism started in reaction to the denominationalism of Joseph Smith’s day
 - b. Those who call themselves “Jehovah’s Witnesses” use religious division to encourage people to follow their own strictly-controlled organization
- **How can any true disciple of Christ support such a harmful concept?**

D. OTHERS WHO VIEWED DENOMINATIONALISM AS WRONG...

1. **Martin Luther**, a leader of the Reformation Movement:
 “I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 3, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have.” - **Hugh Thomason Kerr, A Compend of Luther’s Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943, p. 135)**
 2. **John Wesley**, another reformation leader, among whose followers are Methodists, Wesleyans, etc.:
 “Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist] might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion.” - **John Wesley, Universal Knowledge, A Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Arts, Science, History, Biography, Law, Literature, Religions, Nations, Races, Customs, and Institutions, Vol. 9, Edward A. Pace, Editor (New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1927, p. 540)**
 3. **Charles Spurgeon**, one of the greatest Baptist preachers who ever lived:
 “I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ’s name last forever.” - **Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol. I., p. 168**
- **Note well: these individuals were bemoaning the use of denominational titles, not organizational ties per se**

CONCLUSION

1. But it is organizational ties above the local church that leads to denominationalism...
 - a. Once local churches are “organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy”, denominational names soon follow!
 - b. And so it is that denominationalism with its religious division continues to grow!
2. If local churches are to successfully confront the challenge of denominationalism, they must...
 - a. Remain independent, autonomous (self-governing) congregations
 - b. Refuse organizational associations with other churches
 - c. Refrain from using denominational names for their churches
3. Churches that succeed in avoiding denominationalism are more likely to be...
 - a. Nothing more than local churches of Christ
 - b. Christians who simply seek to follow Jesus as His disciples
 - c. The answer to the prayer of our Lord for unity among believers - cf. **Jn 17:20-21**

But there is another challenge, one that is closely related to denominationalism, which we shall consider in our next study: **Sectarianism!**

Challenges Confronting The Church

Sectarianism

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson, we examined the challenge of **denominationalism**...
 - a. Which involves the organization of local churches under various hierarchies
 - b. Each denomination with its unique names, presenting a divided picture of church
 - c. Contrary to the prayer of Jesus and the doctrine of Paul - **Jn 17:20-23; 1Co 1:10-13**
2. A similar challenge confronting the church is what I describe as **sectarianism**...
 - a. Though I use the term in a rather unique and limited sense
 - b. But as a problem I have seen arise even in opposition to denominationalism
 - c. Leading to a perspective of the church that is akin to a denominational mindset

[What do I mean by sectarianism? Let's begin by considering some dictionary definitions...]

I. DEFINING SECT AND SECTARIANISM

A. WHAT IS A SECT....?

1. A group of people forming a distinct unit within a larger group by virtue of certain refinements or distinctions of belief or practice
 2. A religious body, especially one that has separated from a larger denomination
 3. A faction united by common interests or beliefs
- **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**

B. WHAT IS SECTARIANISM...?

1. Of, relating to, or characteristic of a sect or sectarian
 2. Limited in character or scope: parochial
- **Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary**

C. OBSERVATIONS...

1. Sect and sectarianism are often used as synonyms for denomination and denominationalism
2. In this study, I am limiting my use of the terms to these definitions:
 - a. **Sect**: a faction united by common interests or beliefs
 - b. **Sectarianism**: Limited in character or scope: parochial
3. I am making what may be an arbitrary, but hopefully useful, distinction
 - a. **Denominationalism**: a mindset that sees nothing wrong with dividing up the body of Christ into various denominations
 - b. **Sectarianism**: a mindset that views the body of Christ as limited to a select group of churches identified by a particular and somewhat arbitrary set of doctrinal practices

[Using these two terms as such, perhaps I can clarify the distinction further by reviewing two erroneous views of the church of Christ...]

II. MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH

A. THE DENOMINATIONAL MISCONCEPTION...

1. The Church of Christ is made up of those churches with the name “Church of Christ”
2. The “Church of Christ” (as such) is but one denomination among many
3. Together with other denominations, they constitute the universal church, the Body of Christ
4. Those who hold this view include:
 - a. Those in other denominations, because of their denominational mindset in which they view their own church (denomination) as but a part of the Body of Christ
 - b. Sadly, many in “mainstream” churches of Christ, who are increasingly accepting a denominational view of the church

B. THE SECTARIAN MISCONCEPTION...

1. The Church of Christ is made up only of those churches with the name “Church of Christ”
2. Those churches (as such) constitute the one, true church, the Body of Christ
3. People in any other congregations cannot possibly be members of the Body of Christ
4. Those who hold this view include:
 - a. Many in “mainstream” churches of Christ, especially those who view “Church of Christ” as the official and exclusive name for the Lord’s church
 - b. Many in “non-mainstream” churches of Christ, including those tending to identify themselves on the basis of one particular issue

[With this peculiar distinction between denominationalism and sectarianism hopefully made clear, let me suggest two...]

III. EXAMPLES OF SECTARIANISM

A. INSISTING ON ONE EXCLUSIVE NAME...

1. The Scriptures use a variety of terms describing the Lord’s church - e.g., **Ro 16:16; 1Co 1:2**
2. But some insist there is only one scriptural name (e.g., Church of Christ)
3. This limits one’s view of the church universal to only those churches with the “right name”
4. When there could be other New Testament churches scriptural in every way, but who choose to use a scriptural designation other than “Church of Christ”

B. IDENTIFYING FAITHFULNESS BY ONE PARTICULAR DOCTRINE...

1. Churches are often judged by their stand on particular issues
 - a. E.g., the issue of institutionalism
 - b. E.g., the issue of divorce and remarriage
2. This can lead to rather arbitrary standards of faithfulness
 - a. For example, a church is deemed faithful if it is “non-institutional”
 - b. While in fact it may engage in other unscriptural practices, or be lacking in critical Christian attitudes (e.g., love)
3. I often hear people asking: “Can anyone recommend a NI Church of Christ?”
 - a. Is this not reflecting a sectarian mindset, “limited in character or scope”?
 - b. Why not ask for “...a Baptist Church of Christ?” or “...an Episcopal Church of Christ?”
4. Is this not dangerously close to a denominational mindset?
 - a. Inadvertently creating a new denomination?
 - b. Perhaps leading to “The NI Church of Christ”?

[This is not to lessen the seriousness of erroneous doctrines and practices, for Jesus clearly warned of the danger of false doctrine among churches (**Re 2-3**). But how can we avoid the sectarian mindset that can easily lead to denominationalism...?]

IV. AVOIDING SECTARIANISM

A. WITH A PROPER VIEW OF THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL...

1. Remember what we covered in our first lesson on the universal church:
 - a. Began on the day of Pentecost, composed of all Christians
 - b. The Lord adds those who are being saved, He determines membership
 - c. There is just one spiritual body, there is no earthly organization
2. Thus the church universal is not composed solely of a select group of churches:
 - a. Wearing one official name
 - b. Defined by one particular issue
 - c. Listed in a specialized directory of churches

B. WITH A CAREFUL EVALUATION OF LOCAL CHURCHES...

1. The faithfulness of local churches are determined ultimately by the Lord
 - a. Jesus knows and judges His congregations - e.g., **Re 2:2-3**
 - b. Congregations with false teachers might be tolerated for a time - **Re 2:4-6**
2. Any evaluation we make is subject to our limited knowledge
 - a. Certainly we should do our best to be faithful, and find faithful, churches
 - b. But we must be careful in our judgment of other churches - cf. **Jm 4:11-12**
3. Careful not to discount the possibility of other faithful churches unknown to us
 - a. Scriptural in every way, but perhaps using a different scriptural name
 - b. Though not listed in “our” directory of churches, or known by our association

CONCLUSION

1. Denominationalism and sectarianism can be distinguished by their views of the church...
 - a. **Denominationalism’s view** of the church is **too broad**
 - b. **Sectarianism’s view** of the church is **too narrow**
2. Yet sectarianism often leads to denominationalism...
 - b. By inadvertent use of denominational language (“NI Church of Christ”)
 - a. By a backlash to improper narrow-mindedness typical of sectarianism

My prayer is that we might avoid both denominationalism and sectarianism with a proper view and understanding of the Lord’s church universal and His churches local, while serving the Lord simply as Christians in congregations faithful to His Word...

Challenges Confronting The Church

Factionalism

INTRODUCTION

1. In previous lessons, we examined the challenges of...
 - a. **Denominationalism**
 - b. **Sectarianism**
2. Both of these challenges have often by exacerbated by **factionalism**...
 - a. Leading to the rise of new denominations (38,000 and rising!)
 - b. Contributing to many sectarian views of the church

[What is factionalism? How is it often manifested? How can it be avoided? Let's begin with...]

I. THE DEFINITION OF FACTION AND FACTIONALISM

A. FACTION...

1. A group of persons forming a cohesive, usually contentious minority within a larger group
 2. Conflict within an organization or nation; internal dissension
- **American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**

B. FACTIONALISM...

1. The splitting of a group into factions - **Wiktionary**
2. Factional: self-interested; partisan - **Dictionary.com**

C. IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT...

1. The word translated "factions" is **hairesis** - cf. **1Co 11:19**
 - a. A division of people into different and opposing sets - 'division, separate group.' δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι 'for it is necessary that divisions exist among you' or 'the existence of divisions among you is inevitable' **1Co 11:19** - **Louw-Nida**
 - b. This Greek word is also translated as "heresies" - **2Pe 2:1**
 - c. Which is included among the works of the flesh - **Ga 5:20**
 - d. Together with "dissensions" (**dichostasia**) - those who cause divisions - cf. **Ro 16:17**
2. A derivative is **hairetikon** - cf. **Tit 3:10**
 - a. Pertaining to causing divisions—'divisive, one who causes divisions.' - **Louw-Nida**
 - b. A divisive (factious) man is to be warned and then rejected if he does not repent!

[I would define factionalism as the tendency to split into factions, prompted by a contentious, partisan spirit or disposition. Let's now consider some...]

II. MANIFESTATIONS OF FACTIONALISM

A. WITHIN CHURCHES...

1. The problem at Corinth - **1Co 1:10-12**
 - a. Symptomatic of spiritual immaturity and carnality - **1Co 3:1-4**
 - b. Manifested also in their observance of the Lord's Supper - **1Co 11:17-20**

2. The problem today often exists due to:
 - a. Generational, racial, cultural, or doctrinal issues
 - b. The development of cliques, and then the formation of factions

B. AMONG CHURCHES...

1. The issue of circumcision in the early church - **Ac 15:1-2**
 - a. Led by a faction from the church at Jerusalem
 - b. Creating problems with churches in Syria and Galatia - **Ga 2:11-13; 6:12**
2. Intra-church factions today often occur
 - a. Where congregations often align themselves into a faction
 - b. Usually the first step into sectarianism and denominationalism

C. INFLUENCES OF FACTIONALISM...

1. Undue allegiance - cf. **1Co 1:12**
 - a. To notable persons like a preacher, writer, editor
 - b. To an institution such as a college, missionary or benevolent society
 - c. To brotherhood magazines, lectureships, websites
2. Compounded by the same spirit found at Corinth - cf. **1Co 3:1-4**
 - a. Spiritual immaturity - **1Co 3:1**
 - b. Carnality - **1Co 3:2-4**

[Factionalism needs to be taken seriously. Here are some thoughts for...]

III. AVOIDING FACTIONALISM

A. REMEMBER THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY...

1. Jesus prayed for unity, He died to create unity - **Jn 17:20-21; Ep 2:14-17**
2. Paul condemned division, it is a work of the flesh - **1Co 1:10-13; Ga 5:20**

B. DEVELOP SPIRITUAL MATURITY...

1. Remember, division is often the result of carnality - **1Co 3:1-4**
2. We need the mind of Christ: lowliness of mind and concern for others - **Php 2:1-5**
3. We need to learn gentleness, longsuffering, forbearance, love, diligence - **Ep 4:1-3**

C. CONTEND WITHOUT CONTENTIOUSNESS...

1. Contending for the faith is essential - **Jude 3; Php 1:27**
2. But we can contend without contentiousness, disagree without being disagreeable
3. By displaying the gentleness and meekness of Christ, which together with truth are “weapons mighty in God” - cf. **2Co 10:1-6**

D. AVOID A PARTISAN SPIRIT ...

1. That is, being quick to align oneself with a party, faction, group
2. Instead, strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace - **Ep 4:3-6**
3. Working toward unity if at all possible
4. Being a part of the solution, not the problem

CONCLUSION

1. Factionalism is a terrible, destructive, work of the flesh - **Ga 5:20; Tit 3:10**

- a. Like denominationalism, it hinders unity
 - b. Like sectarianism, it fosters division
2. Unity among brethren is a beautiful thing - **Ps 133:1; Jn 17:21**
- a. It is good and pleasant
 - b. It helps the world to believe in Jesus

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."

- 1Pe 3:8-12

Challenges Confronting The Church

Traditionalism

INTRODUCTION

1. In previous lessons, we examined the challenges of...
 - a. **Denominationalism**
 - b. **Sectarianism**
 - c. **Factionalism**
2. Another challenge that has a long history is **traditionalism**...
 - a. Jesus often conflicted with traditions in His day
 - b. Traditions have often been a major factor in causing division among churches

[What are traditions? Are traditions always wrong? If not, when does a tradition become wrong? How can we be guilty of traditionalism? Let's begin with...]

I. THE MEANING OF TRADITION

A. TRADITION...

1. The Greek word is **paradosis**, which means “giving over” or “handing down”
2. It refers to teaching that is handed down either by word (orally) or in writing

B. AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE JEWS...

1. It applied to the oral teachings of the elders (distinguished elders from Moses on down)
2. These traditions were often divided into three classes...
 - a. Oral laws supposedly given by Moses in addition to the written laws
 - b. Decisions of various judges which became precedents in judicial matters
 - c. Interpretations of highly respected rabbis held in reverence along with the OT scriptures
- **Article on “Tradition”, ISBE**
3. Prior to his conversion, Paul was a staunch supporter of Jewish tradition - **Ga 1:13-14**

C. AS UNDERSTOOD BY ROMAN AND GREEK CATHOLICS...

1. Their views appear to be parallel to that of the Jews
2. What they consider “Tradition” is what they believe to be the teachings:
 - a. Of Jesus or His apostles, persevered orally rather than through writing
 - b. Of various church councils which have left various decrees
 - c. Of various church leaders (such as the pope) considered to be inspired with later revelations from God
3. One is expected to take their word for it that these “traditions” were truly from God and have been faithfully transmitted

D. AS FOUND IN THE SCRIPTURES...

1. The word “tradition” as such is not found in the Old Testament
2. It is found thirteen (13) times in New Testament
 - a. Three times referring to “apostolic teaching” - **1Co 11:2; 2Th 2:15; 3:6**
 - b. Ten times referring to “the tradition of the elders” or “the traditions of men” in a

- dangerous way - **Mk 7:3-13; Mt 15:2-6; Col 2:8; 1Pe 1:18; Ga 1:14**
3. Jesus did not feel bound to abide by “the traditions of the elders”
 - a. Some traditions He had no problem with keeping
 - 1) Such as going to a wedding feast - **Jn 2:1-2**
 - 2) Or attending the Feast Of Dedication - **Jn 10:22-23**
 - b. He just as easily had no problem with violating other traditions
 - 1) Plucking grain on the Sabbath - **Mk 2:23-28**
 - 2) Eating with unwashed hands - **Mk 7:1-5**
 4. Jesus evidently did not subscribe to the view of “traditions” handed down orally
 - a. He never appealed to the traditions of the elders
 - b. He either appealed to the authority of the written Word (the Law of Moses), or to His own authority as the Son of God
 5. **Note well:** We have seen that not all “traditions” are wrong
 - a. If they are “handed down” by inspired men, they are to be heeded - **2Th 2:15**
 - b. If they are doctrines or interpretations handed down by uninspired men (like the traditions of the Jews) they are suspect
 - c. But in some cases uninspired “traditions of men” might be observed

[So traditions of men can be dangerous, or they can be harmless. How can we distinguish between those that are dangerous and those that are harmless? In **Mk 7:1-13**, Jesus provides the answer...]

II. THE DANGER OF TRADITIONS OF MEN

A. THEY CAN LEAD TO HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP...

1. Traditions of men tend toward ritualism (just look at the rituals found in many religions that have no scriptural basis)
2. Such ritualism is often done repeatedly, with little thought as to its origin and purpose
3. It is easy to go through such rituals, with the heart and mind on other things
4. Worship without the heart (or mind) of man is hypocritical worship! - **Mk 7:6**

B. THEY CAN LEAD TO VAIN WORSHIP...

1. When traditions of men are taught on the same level as the commands of God, it leads to vain worship - **Mk 7:7**
2. Such worship may appear to be impressive, but it is actually “empty, worthless”
 - a. First, because God did not command it
 - b. Second, because it does not accomplish the good we really need - cf. **Col 2:18-23**

C. THEY CAN MAKE THE WORD OF GOD VOID...

1. Jesus gave the example of honoring one’s parents - **Mk 7:10-12**
 - a. The elders’ tradition taught giving to the temple freed one from giving to one’s parents
 - b. Thus rendering the command of God of no effect
2. There are traditions of men today with similar affect
 - a. Such as the practice of sprinkling for baptism, a tradition of man
 - b. When one keeps the tradition of sprinkling, they make the command of God to be baptized (immersed) of no effect!
3. Through such traditions, one is actually rejecting the command of God! - **Mk 7:8-9,13**

[With this understanding of traditions and their dangers, let’s now summarize...]

III. TRADITIONS AND TRADITIONALISM: A SUMMARY

A. TRADITIONS...

1. **Traditions of God**, handed down by Christ and His apostles through the Written Word, are necessary for our salvation!
2. **Traditions of men**, handed down by uninspired men, are dangerous and sinful, when they:
 - a. Lead to hypocritical worship
 - b. Lead to vain worship
 - c. Make the Word of God void
3. Traditions of men can be harmless, but they become sinful if they:
 - a. Are taught as doctrines (i.e., equivalent to the Word of God) - **Mk 7:7**
 - b. Make the commandments of God of no effect (by their observance) - **Mk 7:9,13**

B. TRADITIONALISM...

1. Defined: the systematic emphasis on the value of tradition - **Wikipedia**
2. Exemplified by Jewish, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant religions
3. But can also be manifested in churches of Christ
 - a. Doing things a certain way, just because that is how it has always been done
 - b. Binding practices without scriptural basis, because we've always done it that way

CONCLUSION

1. Traditionalism can be viewed as the abuse of tradition...
 - a. Where traditions of men are bound, made equivalent to the traditions of God
 - b. Where traditions of men are kept, even if it makes the commands of God of no effect
2. To avoid traditionalism, we need to be well grounded in the Word of God...
 - a. By which we can examine any tradition being proposed as necessary
 - b. Asking as Jesus did, "From heaven, or from men?" - cf. **Mt 21:25**
 - c. Careful not to bind where God has not bound

So many of the differences and divisions between churches today are due to traditionalism with its abuse of traditions. Let's be careful not to allow traditionalism to keep us from working together in love and unity...

Challenges Confronting The Church

Secularism

INTRODUCTION

1. In previous lessons, we examined the challenges of...
 - a. **Denominationalism**
 - b. **Sectarianism**
 - c. **Factionalism**
 - d. **Traditionalism**
2. Each contribute toward changing the church...
 - a. Into something very different than Jesus intended
 - b. Churches that are carnal, fleshly, more of the world than of God

[A similar challenge confronting churches is the trend toward **secularism**...]

I. DEFINING SECULAR AND SECULARISM

A. SECULAR...

1. Worldly rather than spiritual. - **American Heritage Dictionary**
2. Of or relating to worldly things as distinguished from things relating to church and religion; not sacred or religious; temporal; worldly - **YourDictionary.com**

B. SECULARISM...

1. Indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations - **Merriam-Webster**
2. Worldly spirit, views, or the like; esp., a system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship - **YourDictionary.com**

[One would think that by definition churches would be religious, spiritual, sacred, in nature. Yet many have noted that in too many churches, there are...]

II. MANIFESTATIONS OF SECULARISM

A. THE CHURCH AS A BUSINESS INSTITUTION...

1. In the Bible, the church is a spiritual institution
 - a. The body of Christ, the kingdom of God - **1Co 12:27; Col 1:13**
 - b. The bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit - **2Co 11:2; 1Co 3:16**
 - c. With elders served as shepherds, feeding and guiding the flock of God - **Ac 20:28**
 - d. Deacons met physical needs, but so others could focus on spiritual needs - **Ac 6:1-7**
 - e. Preachers were devoted to the Word, serving as evangelists - **1Ti 4:16; 2Ti 4:5**
2. Today, many churches function more like a business
 - a. Elders are more like board members, directors, corporate managers
 - b. Preachers have become staff managers, counselors, figure heads
 - c. Members divided into committees, departments, with chairpersons, superintendents
 - d. Evangelism has turned into marketing, public relations

B. THE CHURCH AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION...

1. Today, many churches have become social clubs
 - a. Building gymnasiums, eating (“fellowship”) halls
 - b. Offering mental counseling, babysitting services
 - c. Providing entertainment for children and even adults
2. Whereas in the Bible the church focused on the spiritual
 - a. They assembled to worship, edify one another - **Ac 20:7; He 10:24-25**
 - b. Trends leading to make the focus social or secular were addressed - **1Co 11:17-34**
 - c. The assembly was their “fellowship hall”, the Lord’s Supper their “fellowship dinner”
 - d. Families were expected to take care of their social needs, lest the church become burdened and unable to fulfill its primary duties - e.g., **1Ti 5:16**

[Turning the church from a spiritual institution into a secular one does not occur overnight. Changes that appear innocent and harmless may be the “gateway drug” to secularism. A few thoughts for...]

III. AVOIDING SECULARISM**A. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SACRED AND SECULAR...**

1. Let the church fulfill its role as a spiritual institution, focused on:
 - a. Teaching the Word of God, praising God
 - b. Providing opportunities to fulfill spiritual duties (e.g., Lord’s Supper, assembling)
 - c. Equipping the saints for ministry, much of which will occur outside the church
2. Let family and society fulfill their roles
 - a. Parents and friends providing entertainment, physical needs
 - b. Professionals providing medical and counseling needs
 - c. Individuals joining together in charitable organizations to serve others

B. ADOPT BIBLICAL GUIDELINES...

1. The church should focus on providing spiritual needs - **1Co 11:34**
 - a. Many churches struggle as to when and where to draw the line
 - b. Paul does so in this passage; can it not be a guide for us today?
2. As a church, be careful not to take on unnecessary burdens - **1Ti 5:16**
 - a. Many churches are burdened with social concerns, neglecting spiritual ones
 - b. Paul warns against this in this passage; can it not be a guide as well?
3. Let the organization of the church be patterned after the New Testament, not modern day businesses with their titles and organizations - e.g., **Php 1:1**

CONCLUSION

1. The Lord’s church is a wonderful institution; but God has other institutions as well...
 - a. Such as family, government, etc.
 - b. Each uniquely designed and qualified to fulfill their respective roles
2. The Lord’s church is likewise uniquely designed and qualified to fulfill a role...
 - a. One that is spiritual and sacred
 - b. One that can easily be neglected or burdened

Even with the best of intentions, the Lord’s church can easily be transformed from a spiritual institution into a secular one. That is the danger of secularism...!

Challenges Confronting The Church

Institutionalism

INTRODUCTION

1. In this series, so far we have considered the challenges of...
 - a. **Authority In Religion**
 - b. **Denominationalism**
 - c. **Sectarianism**
 - d. **Factionalism**
 - e. **Traditionalism**
 - f. **Secularism**
2. Each of these contribute toward changing the church...
 - a. Into something very different than Jesus intended
 - b. Creating churches that are more worldly than spiritual

[Most of these challenges have a long history in confronting the church. A more recent challenge confronting the church is that of **institutionalism...**]

I. THE DEFINITION OF INSTITUTIONALISM

A. CHURCH SUPPORT OF HUMAN INSTITUTIONS...

1. "...the doctrine or practice of a church sending money to an institution of some kind in order to carry out some work that the church has deemed worthy of support." - [Ryan Waldron](#)
2. "... this may include supporting missionary organizations, orphan's homes, nursing homes, schools, other churches, even political organizations." - **ibid.**

B. SUCH INSTITUTIONS ARE PARACHURCH ORGANIZATIONS...

1. "The parachurch is effectively a new form of religious organization that dates from the early 19th century." - [Parachurch Organizations](#)
2. "In the first quarter of the 19th century, parachurch organizations were abundant in many forms -- Bible tract societies, independent educational organizations, independent missionary groups, and moral reform organizations." - **ibid.**
3. "The defining characteristic of a parachurch is that it stands outside of the organizational structure of well-established religious bodies." - **ibid.**
4. "Parachurches are often the creation of an entrepreneur or a small cadre of people who seek to achieve specific goals." - **ibid.**

C. THE ISSUE OF INSTITUTIONALISM...

1. The goals of such institutions are certainly noble: evangelism, benevolence, edification, etc.
2. The issue in this study is not whether such institutions have a right to exist
3. The issue is whether local churches should support them out of their treasury

[Is institutionalism really a challenge confronting the church? Some consider it a blessing: "Look at all the good churches can do through parachurch organizations!" But consider some thoughts regarding...]

II. THE PROBLEM WITH INSTITUTIONALISM

A. PERSONAL CONCERNS...

1. It has no scriptural support
 - a. There is no example of NT churches sending money to human institutions as a way of carrying out their work of evangelism, edification, or benevolence
 - b. The practice began in the 19th century (see above)
 - c. NT churches sent money directly to other churches or individuals - **Ac 11:27-30; 1Co 16:1-4; Ro 15:25-26**
2. It gives oversight of the local church's work to those not its elders
 - a. Human institutions are governed by board members, CEOs, or other individuals
 - b. Churches outsource their work and their oversight by giving to such organizations
3. It turns local churches into collection agencies for man-made organizations
 - a. Institutions appeal for churches to support their organizations
 - b. The local church thus becomes a mini "United Way" for human institutions
4. It tends to denominationalize the church
 - a. Institutions usually identify their association with a particular group of churches
 - b. E.g., a "Church of Christ college", or "Church of Christ benevolent home", etc.
 - c. The use of "Church of Christ" in such a way contributes to a denominational mindset
5. It has led to division among many churches
 - a. Supporters of human institutions fight hard to get them into churches budgets
 - b. Churches and individuals that do not go along are often libeled ("anti!", "orphan hater!")
 - c. Brotherhood papers have used such issues to quarantine and isolate the opposition

B. ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS...

1. It deprives the church of workers
 - a. "One result is that capable teachers and preachers have been called away from their primary ministries in order to become administrators."
 - b. "If all mission board administrators were serving on the mission field, it would greatly reduce the need for personnel there."
2. It is an inefficient use of funds
 - a. "Another result of the proliferation of organizations is that vast sums of money are needed for overhead, and thus diverted from direct gospel outreach."
 - b. "The greater part of every dollar given to many Christian organizations is devoted to the expense of maintaining the organization rather than to the primary purpose for which it was founded."
3. It can hinder the spread of truth
 - a. "Organizations often hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commission."
 - b. "Jesus told His disciples to teach all the things He had commanded."
 - c. "Many who work for Christian organizations find they are not permitted to teach all the truth of God."
 - d. "They must not teach certain controversial matters for fear they will alienate the constituency to whom they look for financial support."
4. It contributes to factionalism
 - a. "The multiplication of Christian institutions has too often resulted in factions, jealousy, and rivalry that have done great harm to the testimony of Christ."
 - b. "Consider the overlapping multiplicity of Christian organizations at work, at home, and abroad. Each competes for limited personnel and for shrinking financial resources. And consider how many of these organizations really owe their origin to purely human rivalry, though public statements usually refer to God's will." (Daily Notes of the Scripture Union)

-- [William McDonald, Parachurch Organization](#)

C. ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE...

1. “An acute writer, contrasting the apostolic work with the more usual modern missionary methods, has said that ‘we found missions, the apostles founded churches.’ The distinction is sound and pregnant.”
 2. “The apostles founded churches, and they founded nothing else, because for the ends in view nothing else was required or could have been so suitable.”
 3. “In each place where they labored they formed the converts into a local assembly, with elders - always elders, never an elder (**Ac 14:23; 15:6, 23; 20:17 Php 1:1**) to guide, to rule, to shepherd, men qualified by the Lord and recognized by the saints (**1Co 16:15; 1Th 5:12,13; 1Ti 5:17-19**); and with deacons, appointed by the assembly (**Ac 6:1-6; Php 1:1**) - in this contrasted with the elders - to attend to the few but very important temporal affairs, and in particular to the distribution of the funds of the assembly...”
 4. “All they (the apostles) did in the way of organizing was to form the disciples gathered into other such assemblies. No other organization than the local assembly appears in the New Testament, nor do we find even the germ of anything further.”
- [C. H. Lang, quoted in Parachurch Organization](#)

CONCLUSION

1. Again, the question in this study is...
 - a. Not whether institutions per se have a right to exist
 - b. But whether local churches should support them out of their treasury
2. We have seen that church support of human institutions...
 - a. Is without scriptural precedent
 - b. Affects the church in its ability to do its work
 - c. Contributes to factionalism and denominationalism
3. Let us not forget that the local church is limited in its resources...
 - a. It can easily become “burdened” - cf. **1Ti 5:16**
 - b. It can be hindered or distracted from fulfilling its true purpose intended by God

Do we want to be guilty of hindering the church instituted by Christ, purchased with His blood (**Ac 20:28**) from doing its divinely authorized work...?

Challenges Confronting The Church

The Sponsoring Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In this series, so far we have considered the challenges of...
 - a. **Authority In Religion**
 - b. **Denominationalism**
 - c. **Sectarianism**
 - d. **Factionalism**
 - e. **Traditionalism**
 - f. **Secularism**
 - g. **Institutionalism**
2. Each of these contribute toward changing the church...
 - a. Into something very different than Jesus intended
 - b. Creating churches that are more worldly than spiritual

[There is one more challenge I wish to cover in this series. One closely related to institutionalism, and has been at times a reaction to certain forms of institutionalism: the **sponsoring church** concept...]

I. THE DEFINITION OF THE SPONSORING CHURCH

A. EXPLAINED...

1. Where one congregation oversees (sponsors):
 - a. Either a work in another area
 - b. Or the combined efforts of two or more churches
2. “One congregation that especially oversees a project such as a mission society, in which other congregations have an interest and to which they voluntarily contribute regularly.”
- **J. D. Thomas, We Be Brethren, p. 355**
3. “The fact that other churches contribute to a project that is overseen by the elders of one church is the central idea.” - **ibid.**
4. “A sponsoring church is a congregation which assumes the oversight and control of some activity in the general field of evangelism, edification, or benevolence.” - **Kevin Kay, Institutionalism: Sponsoring Church**

B. EXAMPLES...

1. A church sponsors a foreign work, with its elders overseeing the evangelist(s) and the congregation(s) in a particular area
2. A church sponsors a work beyond its own ability to finance (e.g., TV, radio), and asks other churches to financially support its efforts
3. A church sponsors an evangelist, with other churches channeling their support of said evangelist through the auspices and control of the sponsoring church

C. ORIGIN...

1. The sponsoring church concept was developed as an alternative to parachurch organizations
2. For example, many churches of Christ opposed human institutions like missionary societies
3. The sponsoring church concept sought to do the same work through churches rather than missionary societies

[At a quick glance, one might wonder, “What is so bad about that?” I believe there are reasons to be concerned...]

II. PROBLEMS WITH THE SPONSORING CHURCH

A. IT IS WITHOUT SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT...

1. Some point to Jerusalem as a sponsoring church - **Ac 11:29-30; 12:25**
 - a. Claiming the elders of the Jerusalem oversaw the work of distributing funds from the church in Antioch
 - b. But the elders in **Ac 11:30** are just as likely those of the churches in Judea, not Jerusalem
2. Some believe Philippi sponsored Paul's support - **2Co 11:8; Php 4:15-16**
 - a. Presuming that support from other churches were funneled through Philippi
 - b. But Paul's remarks in **Php 4:15** refer to the beginning of the work in Macedonia
 - c. **2Co 11:8** can easily include later support received directly from other churches

B. IT GIVES TOO MUCH OVERSIGHT TO ELDERS...

1. Elders are to oversee the flock of God “among” them - cf. **Ac 20:28; 1Pe 5:1-2**
2. Elders of a sponsoring church have oversight beyond the local congregation
3. They oversee works in other places, even churches in other countries
4. Who gave the elders the right to assume such authority?

C. IT VIOLATES THE NT PATTERN FOR LOCAL AUTONOMY...

1. In the NT, congregations were independent, autonomous
2. Other than the Lord and His apostles, a congregation was answerable only to its elders - cf. **1Pe 5:5; He 13:7,17**
3. Elders of sponsoring churches expects churches/individuals they sponsor to answer to them
4. Sponsoring churches have sought to control the actions and even the property of churches or works they sponsor (especially in foreign countries)

D. IT REVERSES SCRIPTURAL COOPERATION BETWEEN CHURCHES...

1. In the NT, support always worked toward the direction of equality - cf. **2Co 8:13-14**
2. With the sponsoring church concept, smaller churches send money to bigger churches
3. Instead of equality, big churches become bigger at the expense of smaller churches

E. IT SEEKS TO ACTIVATE THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH...

1. The sponsoring church concept was originally developed in opposition to church supported missionary societies (e.g., the American Christian Missionary Society)
2. The missionary society concept was designed to activate the universal church
3. Thus the sponsoring church seeks to accomplish the same goal as the missionary society
4. Yet such efforts have unintended consequences, including the next problem...

F. IT LEADS TO DENOMINATIONALIZING THE CHURCH...

1. Attempts to activate the universal church lead to factionalism and denominationalism
2. Invariably, such efforts separate those who support such efforts from those who do not
3. Before long, groups of churches are identified by whether or not they support such efforts (e.g., so-called “cooperative” vs. “non-cooperative” churches)
4. People begin asking “Are you with us, or them?”, sounding like Corinth - cf. **1Co 1:11-12**

CONCLUSION

1. Like institutionalism, the sponsoring church concept began with good intentions...
 - a. A desire to do good
 - b. A desire to do more

2. But like institutionalism, the sponsoring church concept has unintended consequences...
 - a. Changing the nature, work, even the organization of the church
 - b. Contributing to traditionalism, factionalism, sectarianism, denominationalism

As the Lord's church enters the third millennium, we do well to constantly examine ourselves, looking to the Scriptures to make sure that we are what the Lord wants us to be, willing to confront any challenge that threatens the church for which Jesus died...