

LESSON 13 – INNOVATIONS IN THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) In our previous study, we summarized the work of the church as:
 - i) Edification – encouraging and building up the saints to prepare them for service
 - ii) Benevolence – providing for needy saints
 - iii) Evangelism – proclaiming the gospel in our community and throughout the world
- b) Whenever a local church is working as it should, it will:
 - i) “equip saints for the work of the ministry” – **Eph 4:12**
 - ii) “edify the body of Christ” – **Eph 4:12**
 - iii) cause us to “grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ” – **Eph 4:15**
- c) However, it is not uncommon for local church to work and act in ways God did not intend, such as for political or social activism
 - i) It is not that such causes are without merit. As individual Christians, we should all participate in such matters
 - ii) And it is certainly ok for individual Christians to use other organizations such as family, community, or governmental agencies
- d) However, as we learned in the previous lesson, God has limited the local church in both its work and its resources
 - i) Today, many local churches can become “burdened”, in that it can be hindered and distracted from fulfilling its true purpose – **1 Tim 5:16**
 - ii) Among many churches, innovations have been introduced into the work of the church. Though well intentioned, they tend to denominationalize and/or secularize the church
 - iii) This lesson will focus on some of these innovations and why they are wrong

2) INSTITUTIONALISM

- a) Institutionalism: the support of extra-church institutions from the treasury of local churches
 - i) This involves local churches sending money to an institution of some kind in order to carry out a work that the local church has deemed worthy of support
 - ii) This may include supporting missionary organizations, orphan's homes, nursing homes, schools, other local churches, or even political organizations
- b) Such institutions are sometimes called “parachurch organizations”
 - i) The parachurch is effectively a new form of religious organization that dates from the early 19th century
 - ii) 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
 - iii) The defining characteristic of a parachurch is that it stands outside of the organizational structure of a local church, created by an entrepreneur or a small cadre of people who seek to achieve specific goals
- c) The goal of these institutions is certainly noble: evangelism, benevolence, edification, etc.
 - i) The issue in this study is not whether such institutions have a right to exist
 - ii) The issue is whether local churches should support them out of their treasury
- d) The problem with Institutionalism

- i) First, there is no scriptural authority for local churches to support human institutions from its treasury
 - (1) 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
 - (2) This practice did not begin until the 19th century. But in the NT, churches sent money directly to other churches or individuals – **Acts 4:32-35; 11:27-30; Rom 15:25-26; Phil 4:15-16**

- ii) Second, it gives oversight of the local church's work to those not of its eldership
 - (1) Human institutions are governed by board members, CEOs, or other individuals who are outside of the eldership of the local church
 - (2) In sending money to these organizations, local churches “outsource” their work and their oversight. Hence, it comprises its autonomy – **1 Pet 5:2**

- iii) Third, it turns the local church into a collection agency for man-made organizations
 - (1) Institutions are constantly appealing for local churches to support their organizations through mail and phone calls
 - (2) The local church thus becomes a mini 'United Way' for these institutions who become obsessed with obtaining the money to continue its work – **1 Tim 6:10**

- iv) Fourth, history shows that it tends to denominationalize the church
 - (1) Institutions usually identify their association with a particular group of churches
 - (2) Examples: a “Church of Christ school”, or “Church of Christ benevolent home”
 - (3) The use of “Church of Christ” in such a way contributes to a denominational mindset
 - (4) This denominational mindset can lead to the institution having a centralized influence over the local churches it contributes to (example: Herald of Truth)

- v) Additional insights regarding the problems with institutionalism come from an article on **Parachurch Organizations by William McDonald:**
 - (1) “One result is that capable teachers and preachers have been called away from their primary ministries in order to become administrators. If all mission board administrators were serving on the mission field, it would greatly reduce the need for personnel there.”
 - (2) “Another result of the proliferation of organizations is that vast sums of money are needed for overhead, and thus diverted from direct gospel outreach. 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) “Organizations often hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Jesus told His disciples to teach all the things He had commanded. Many who work for Christian organizations find they are not permitted to teach all the truth of God. They must not teach certain controversial matters for fear they will alienate the constituency to whom they look for financial support.”
 - (4) “The multiplication of Christian institutions has too often resulted in factions, jealousy, and rivalry that have done great harm to the testimony of Christ. 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).” - <http://web.singnet.com.sg/~syec/literature/parachurch.html>

3) SPONSORING CHURCHES

- i) A sponsoring church is a local church which assumes the oversight and control of some activity in evangelism, edification, or benevolence in which multiple local churches contribute monetarily
 - ii) A sponsoring church oversees a project such as a mission society, in which other local churches have an interest and to which they voluntarily contribute regularly
 - iii) The fact that other local churches contribute to this project means that the work is overseen by the elders of the “sponsoring” church
- b) Some examples of common sponsoring church arrangements
- i) A church sponsors a foreign work, with its elders overseeing the evangelist(s) and the local church(s) in a particular area
 - ii) A church sponsors a work beyond its own ability to finance (e.g., TV, radio), and asks other churches to financially support its efforts
 - iii) A church sponsors an evangelist, with other churches channeling their support of said evangelist through the control of the sponsoring church
- c) The sponsoring church concept was developed as an alternative to institutionalism and parachurch organizations
- i) Many opposed contributing from the local church treasury to human institutions like missionary societies, bible colleges, and orphan homes
 - ii) This alternative sought to do the same work through churches rather than institutions
- d) Problems with the sponsoring church arrangement
- i) First, there is no clear scriptural support for this concept
 - (1) Some point to Jerusalem as a ‘sponsoring church’, where supposedly the elders of the Jerusalem church oversaw the work - **Act 11:29-30; 12:25**
 - (2) But the ‘elders’ in **Act 11:30** are just as likely those of the churches in Judea
 - (3) Some believe Philippi ‘sponsored’ Paul’s support, where supposedly support from other churches were funneled through Philippi- **2 Cor 11:8; Phil 4:15-16**
 - (4) But Paul’s remarks in **Phil 4:15** refer to the beginning of the work in Macedonia, and **2 Cor 11:8** can easily include support received directly from other churches later
 - ii) Second, it gives too much oversight to the elders of one local church
 - (1) Elders were to oversee the flock of God “among you” – **Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-2**
 - (2) Elders of a sponsoring church have oversight beyond the local congregation in that they oversee works in other places and even works in other countries
 - (3) Elders have no such right or authority outside of their local work
 - iii) Third, it violates the NT pattern for local church autonomy
 - (1) In the NT, congregations were independent and autonomous
 - (2) Other than the Lord and His apostles, a congregation was answerable only to its elders - **1 Pet 5:5; Heb 13:7,17**
 - (3) However elders of the sponsoring church expects other local churches they “sponsor” to be answerable to them
 - (4) History has shown that sponsoring churches have sought to control the actions and even the property of churches or works they “sponsor” (especially in foreign countries)
 - iv) Fourth, it reverses the goal of scriptural cooperation between churches
 - (1) In the NT, support always worked toward the direction of equality - **2 Cor 8:13-14**
 - (2) But in 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

- v) Fifth, 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 as the missionary society
 - (4) Yet such efforts lead to the next problem...

- vi) Sixth, it leads to denominationalizing the church
 - (1) Attempts to activate the universal church leads to 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., institutional vs. non-institutional churches)
 - (4) People begin asking “Are you with us, or them?”, sounding like those in Corinth - **1 Cor 1:11-12**

4) ***THE SOCIAL GOSPEL***

- a) Social Programs Designed
 - i) Where churches use their funds to offer social programs
 - (1) Either for their own members
 - (2) Or for those in their community and beyond

 - ii) Social programs such as:
 - (1) Day care centers, schools, counseling services
 - (2) Orphan homes, disaster relief, medical missions
 - (3) Family life centers, gymnasiums, racket ball courts

 - iii) Through such efforts, using the local church to:
 - (1) Solve social ills in our society
 - (2) Provide entertainment for young people to keep them interested and out of trouble

- b) Problems With Social Programs
 - i) First, there is no scriptural support for the church to support social programs
 - (1) The church certainly provided benevolence for Christians - **1 Cor 16:1-2; Rom 15:26**
 - (2) As individuals we are certainly to be “good Samaritans” - **Gal 6:10; Jas 1:27**
 - (3) But there is no NT pattern that suggests the local church should become a business that offers such a wide range of services

 - ii) Second, it burdens the local church with activities for which it was not designed
 - (1) Notice Paul's concern that the church not be ‘burdened’ - **1 Tim 5:16**
 - (2) Christians were expected to fulfill their familial duties - **1 Tim 5:8**
 - (3) Thus limitations were placed on who the church could support - **1 Tim 5:9-13**
 - (4) The church has its own work to fulfill (e.g., evangelism, edification), while the Lord expects individuals, families, governments, and society at large to fulfill their duties - **1 Tim 5:4,14** (family); **Rom 13:3-4** (government)
 - (5) How many Christians in third world countries are starving to death because we’re spending money we should be sending them to entertain ourselves?
 - (6) How many preachers are under-supported and therefore overburdened because we’re improperly using the funds from our weekly collection?

 - iii) Third, it has the long term effect of secularizing the church
 - (1) Secularize - To draw away from religious orientation; make worldly
 - (2) The effects of secularization on the church through social programs are evident:

- (3) Elders (shepherds, pastors) become board members, directors, managers
- (4) Evangelists (preachers, ministers) become staff managers, personal counselors, and social planners
- (5) Churches have youth directors, education superintendents, family counselors, secretaries, janitors, etc.

iv) Fourth, it takes emphasis away from the cross and draws people to church with carnal bait

- (1) Paul was so careful not to impede on the gospel, he did not personally baptize when it became a stumbling block – **1 Cor 1:14-15**
- (2) Paul's reasoning was not to allow anything to infringe upon the power of the cross to convert an individual – **1 Cor 1:17**
- (3) However, many local churches today have lost confidence in the power of the cross to change lives and have therefore tried to draw people in through carnal methods
- (4) God doesn't need our help. He designed the gospel to be its own drawing power.

v) When a local church gives in to the social gospel and places priority on social programs, it loses its spiritual focus and becomes:

- (1) A business instead of a body
- (2) A foundation instead of a family
- (3) A corporation instead of a church