

The Work of The Church #7 (Expediencies)

Introduction:

- I. We have now come to our final lesson on the work of the church. We have seen several important things in this series of lessons.

First, we emphasized what makes something the work of the church. The work of the church has to do with that which is planned, provided, participated in and or paid for by the church. At that time we pointed out that we are not discussing in this series what the individual can do, but rather what the local church can do, and that there is a difference between the individual Christian and the church.

Second, we emphasized what the scriptural work of the church is and is not. It is not to heal all of the social ills of the church. The work of the church is not social in nature, but rather it is spiritual. It is not to engage in and finance recreation and entertainment. The work of the church is not to teach secular education, nor is it to get involved in business. What then is the work of the church?

We have found from scripture that the work of the church is threefold (**Eph. 4:12**). The threefold work of the church is **evangelism, benevolence and edification**. This is all we have the authority to do. We have emphasized that we must have Bible authority for all that we do (**Col. 3:17**). We also emphasized that we must follow the divine pattern in carrying out the work of the church (**Heb. 8:5**). What is the pattern?

In evangelism we found that churches always sent funds directly to the preacher (no sponsoring churches in the N.T.). We also found that no church ever sent money to another local church to do the work of evangelism. Each local church did its own work.

In benevolence we found that churches sent money directly to local churches that were in need (no sponsoring churches). We also noticed that according to the pattern, no church we superior financial ability ever received funds from a church that we financially inferior.

Finally, last week we dealt with the matter of institutionalism. We pointed out that institutionalism has to do with building and financially maintaining man made institutions to do the work of the church. There is no Bible authority for such action, instead the church is to do what God has commanded it to do. We emphasized that the issue in institutionalism is not whether or not the church should do its work. IT SHOULD. The issue is not how the church should do its work, but the issue is WHO should do it.

Listen to this prominent gospel preacher on the issue of who should do the work of the church in the area of benevolence:

The ship of Zion has floundered more than once on the sand-bar of institutionalism. The tendency to organize is characteristic of the age. This writer has ever been unable to appreciate the logic of those who affect to see grave danger in the missionary society but scruple not to form organizations for the purpose of caring for orphans, and teaching young men to be gospel preachers. Of course it is right for the church to care for the fatherless and widows in their affliction, but the work should be done by and through the church with the elders having the oversight thereof. (Guy N. Woods, ACC Lectures, 1939, p.54).

Oddly enough, by the mid 20th century this preacher was in favor of institutions doing the work of the church. He preached something different in the 1950s than he did in the 1930s, but the truth is he was right in the 30s and that where we stand now.

- II. Now then, in this final lesson we want to discuss the issue of expediencies. Many brethren have tried to justify unauthorized practices by putting those practices into the category of an expediency. Now, since some of the things that we do fall into this category, we need to know what an expediency is.

Lesson:

I. What Is An Expediency?

Thayer says that the word “expedient” means, **“To help, or to be profitable.”** Vines says it means, **“to be profitable or advantageous.”** When we talk about “expediencies,” then, we are talking about things that are helpful to us in carrying out God’s revealed will. Now listen to me: if we are not talking about aids that help us in carrying out things that are not a part of God’s will, we are talking about aids that help us in keeping the commandments of God.

II. Rules To Remember About Expediencies.

A. An Expediency Must Be Lawful (1 Cor. 6:12).

If a thing doesn’t come within the scope of that which is authorized, it is unlawful and therefore sinful. If we preach something that has not been revealed by divine truth, or practice something outside the realm of revelation, we sin against God (**2 Jn. 9**). Now, something that is sinful can never be expedient. Remember, an expediency is

something profitable, but it is never profitable to sin against God. Can you think of a sin that is profitable or advantageous to the soul? Of course not. Thus, anything that is expedient must first be lawful, that is, it must be authorized by God. Now, we must take the time here to discuss what makes something authorized.

1. How To Establish Bible Authority.

- a. **Direct command or statement (1 Cor. 11:23).**
- b. **Approved or apostolic example (Acts 20:7).**
- c. **Necessary Inference or implication (Acts 20:7).**

2. Two Kinds of Bible Authority.

- a. **Specific (Gen. 6:14).**
- b. **Generic – tools used in making the ark.**

Now then, anything that doesn't fit within the realm of authority is not expedient. If you can't fit a practice into a direct command, approved example or necessary inference it is not expedient.

B. An Expediency Must Be An Non-essential.

An expediency is something that is profitable, but not necessary. Expediencies involve choices that are expressions of generic authority. Now, when God specifies something, there is no choice. We must comply to the specifications of God or be guilty of sin. For instance, baptism is profitable, but only if we follow God's specifications. Can we say that sprinkling is an expedient way of carrying out God's command to be baptized? No, because God specifies that baptism is a burial (**Rom. 6:4**). Sprinkling is not an expediency, it is an addition to what God said to do. On the other hand, a baptistery is an expediency, i.e., an authorized non-essential that can aid us in keeping God's command to baptize.

C. An Expediency Must Edify (1 Cor. 10:23).

If God commands us to do something a certain way, we must do it regardless of how people feel about it. But if we are dealing with an expediency, i.e., something that is a matter of choice involving human wisdom or judgment, and the practice of it destroys what God would have us build up (*the local church*) by causing division, that thing ceases to be expedient.

D. An Expediency Must Not Offend (1 Cor. 10:32-33; 8:7-13; Rom. 14:14-16).

For the most part this rule applies to individual actions, not congregational action. First of all the text of these passages is individual in nature. Secondly, if broadly applied to the collective action of the local church, it would allow one or two brethren to hold the church hostage to their scruples, virtually paralyzing the local church (e.g., overhead, gospel meetings, separate classes for teaching, etc.). However, some good judgment is in order here. A local church would not want to do something, even if it is permissible, if half the congregation is going to object or be offended. A practice that divides the church can not be said to be profitable.

III. Making Application of Expediencies And Bible Authority.

God commanded Noah to make an ark. **Wood** would be **essential** to keeping the command. **Gopher wood** is specified. While the size of the logs, the shape of the logs and the tools he used would all be expediencies, **another type** of wood would be an **addition**.

God commanded disciples to go and teach. A **message** would be **essential** in keeping the command. The **gospel** is the specified message. While the method of teaching or the means of going would be expediencies, **another message** would be an **addition**.

God commanded disciples to sing. **Spiritual songs** would be **essential** in keeping the command. **Singing** is specified kind of music. While the different songs, song book, song leaders, etc. would be expediencies, **playing** an instrument (another type of music) would be an **addition**.

God commanded disciples to partake of the Lord's Supper. The **elements** would be essential in keeping the command. **Bread & fruit of the vine** are specified. While the table, plate and containers would be expediencies, **another element** (cake, ice cream & Pepsi) would be an **addition**.

God commanded the church to work. The **local church** (proper organization) would be essential. **Evangelism, Benevolence, & Edification** are specified. While different means may be expedient, another organization (human institutions) would be an **addition**.

God commanded the church to work. The **local church** (proper organization) would be essential. **Evangelism, Benevolence, & Edification** are specified. While different means may be expedient, another work (recreation, entertainment, secular education) would be an **addition**.

Conclusion:

Let's not try to justify unlawful things by simply saying they are expedient. No, additions are sinful (**2 Jn. 9**). Let's do the work of the church. Let's do only the work of the church no more or no less. Let's make sure that we do the work, and not build human institutions to do it for us.

And finally, let's not compromise our convictions by extending the right hand of fellowship churches that are doing things that are unauthorized, unscriptural and therefore sinful (**2 Jn. 10-11**). Let's remember the admonition of Paul (**Eph. 5:11**). Nothing good comes from a soft, unity in diversity approach to truth. I want to close with a statement made by Jesse P. Sewell in the 1950 Harding College Lectureship, Searcy, Arkansas, under the subject "Biographical Sketches," pages 74 and 75:

Now I will tell this incident in the life of Brother J.W. McGarvey. In January, 1902 or 1903, I was preaching for the Pearl and Bryan Streets Church in Dallas. Brother McGarvey, an old man at the time, was invited to speak at the Central Christian Church in Dallas. We had three men in the Pearl and Bryan Church who had graduated from the College of the Bible in Lexington, under Brother McGarvey, and they were great admirers of him. They suggested that we invite Brother McGarvey to preach at Pearl and Bryan that night. We did so. I was just a boy of 24 or 25 then. I was sitting by the side of this great old man on the front seat, waiting for the service to begin. As we sat there talking, Brother McGarvey said to me: "Brother Sewell, I want to say something to you, if you'll accept it in the spirit in which I mean it." I told him I'd appreciate anything he had to say to me. He said about these words, "You are on the right road, and whatever you do, don't ever let anybody persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshipping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believed at the start that was the only way to do it. I've never held membership in a congregation that uses instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinction between churches that used it and churches that didn't. I've gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches it to every young preacher who has passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of these men who are preaching the truth today." He said, "It won't work."