

Fellowship Halls, Kitchens, Etc.

INTRODUCTION:

1. 1 Timothy 5:16. Clearly, the local church should not be burdened with any and every responsibility, or activity.
2. Review:
 - a. Lesson 1: Two major points were made: 1) Local churches should not be burdened with providing secular education. 2) Local churches should provide spiritual education, but not by supporting some other institution to do what the Lord fully equipped them to do.
 - b. Lesson 2: Do not let the church be burdened with planning, providing, or paying for the recreation and entertainment of its members (in general, purely social activities).
3. Today's lesson: We're still talking about social activities, but let's concentrate on one in particular, since there's been so much controversy about it. Do not let the church be burdened with building "fellowship halls" and kitchens, with providing social meals for its members.
 - a. This practice is very popular, certainly among denominations, but also among many churches of Christ. It certainly encourages more people to attend services, when they know a meal will be provided either before or after services.
 - b. Here's a little history behind fellowship halls and kitchens, at least among churches of Christ. In 1947 M. Norvel Young, during a lectureship in Abilene, TX, encouraged churches to build new buildings, to build them in good locations, and to include in their buildings, among many other things, a large fellowship room and cooking facilities that would be near this large fellowship room. He continued to write some articles after that, encouraging brethren to do this. It didn't really catch on too well; in fact the vast majority of brethren were still opposed. Bill Hall came to Montgomery in 1954 to attend school. He said none of the churches of Christ in Montgomery had one then, and didn't for many years after that. It was toward the end of the 60's and into the 70's when the practice picked up. Many churches of Christ that planned new buildings began to include fellowship halls and kitchens.
4. Before we go any further, let's make sure we understand what the issue is NOT.

- a. First, the issue is not whether or not the building is sacred. I'm not exactly sure how people use that term. The building is certainly built to be used for spiritual purposes. If not, then it has no right to exist. But if we are talking about the building itself—the materials, the furnishings, etc.—no, it is not sacred. It certainly shouldn't be viewed in the same way we view the tabernacle or the temple.
 - b. Secondly, the issue is not whether someone can eat something in a building owned by the church. Years ago, when this issue was first debated, people would say, "If these people are right, a mother couldn't even give her baby a bottle of milk in the building." Others tried to compare kitchens and fellowship halls with the water fountain. "If kitchens and fellowship halls are not authorized, then neither are water fountains." However sincere these people may have been, they missed the point. Lynn Headrick had this response: "When we find the church planning social activities around the water cooler, then we'll take the water cooler out." That helps to clarify the issue.
 - c. Could someone tie his or her shoes in the building? Of course. But what about the church having a shoe-tying ceremony? Do you see the difference?
5. This IS the issue: Does the N.T. authorize a local church to plan and provide resources for social activities in its program of work, and specifically, to plan social meals, or provide either the facilities or the food for these meals? Is there a command? An example? A passage that implies it should be done?

BODY:

To help us answer this question, let's go through the N.T. and see if we can determine what a local church is authorized to do. We're not looking for the activities of individual disciples; we're looking for what these individual disciples do together in the local church.

1. Assemble together (Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 20:7).
 - a. Where is the authority for the building we're sitting in today? In the charge given to local churches to arrange a place for assembly.
2. In such an assembly, the saints should observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
 - a. The church here provides various things to help us fulfill this command—a table, bread plates, communion trays with cups, the bread and the fruit of the vine.

3. When assembled, they should also sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord, and by so doing, teach and admonish one another (1 Cor. 14:15; Hebrews 2:12; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
 - a. To this end, the church provides songbooks and arranges for different ones to lead the singing.
4. When assembled together, saints should also pray together (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:14-17).
5. The church should be involved in teaching and preaching God's word (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Acts 11:26).
 - a. Provisions for this include the overhead screen, PowerPoint projection, the classrooms, bulletin boards, sound system, etc.
6. On the first day of the week, saints should give as they have prospered, to finance the work they do as a congregation (1 Cor. 16:1-2).
 - a. And so the church provides collection plates to assist in fulfilling this command.
7. In these same assemblies, brethren can be informed of needs (Acts 11:27-30).
8. The local church can discipline its own members, and announce it during these assemblies (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Titus 3:10-11).
 - a. On the positive side, these assemblies can also be used to commend people (3 John 1:5-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4).
9. The local church can appoint elders and deacons (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9).
10. A local church should support the preaching the gospel—in a financial way (Philippians 1:5; 4:14-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8).
 - a. Presently, the church here supports several evangelists, including myself. And there is certainly authority for reports to be given about this work (Acts 14:27; 15:4).
 - b. Evangelistic efforts could also include sending some of our own to other places (Acts 11:19-24; Acts 13:1-4; 14:26-27; Acts 15:39-40).
 - c. This is one way these funds collected on the first day of the week should be used.
11. A local church can provide for saints who may be in financial need (Acts 2, 4, 6, 11; Romans 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8-9, etc.).

- a. Obligation falls first on the families, but if they can't provide what's needed, the church is certainly authorized to help.

12. A local church can communicate with other local churches (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Acts 18:27).

This is really all I can find in the Scriptures. When we see what the Lord has authorized the church to do, then that gives us the authority to provide whatever is needful for carrying out what God has told the church to do.

Now, if we could just find the Scripture where a local church was involved in social activities, then we could build a fellowship hall or a kitchen. But that's the point. We simply cannot find the Scripture.

CONCLUSION:

1. To be fair, some feel like they have found a Scripture or Scriptures that authorize these things. We'll talk in more detail about these next week, but I want to mention them now so that you can do some study on your own.
 - a. Jude 1:12 (love feasts); 2 Peter 2:13 (may or may not be referring to same things). Study these passages to see if you can find authority in them for fellowship halls and kitchens.
 - b. Others: 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Acts 2:42-47; Acts 6:1-4; Ephesians 4:11-12 (some like to include "fellowship meals" under the work of edification).
 - c. Another commonly used argument centers around the word "fellowship." One thing I want you to think about: Do we not already have a fellowship hall? I believe we do—and we're sitting in it right now (this auditorium where we worship). We're having fellowship with God, and with one another right now. And do we not already partake regularly of a fellowship meal? We did earlier today—we ate the Lord's Supper. We'll talk some more about this in the next lesson.