

## What the Church Can and Cannot Do

*John Isaac Edwards*

**A**s the body can only act by the impulse of the head, every activity of the church is governed and regulated by Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 3:17). So, to the Testament of Christ we turn to learn what the church can and cannot do.

***The Church Can Preach the Gospel to the Lost.*** The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The church of the Thessalonians “sounded out the word of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). The local church can support a preacher while he labors among them (1 Corinthians 9:1-14; 2 Corinthians 12:13), send a preacher to another place (Acts 11:22), and support preachers as they labor in other areas (Philippians 4:14-18). In New Testament days, the local church sent directly to the preacher. There was never another church or organization that stood between the sending church and the receiving preacher.

***The Church Cannot Plan or Provide Social Activities or Functions.*** The preaching of the gospel will improve the attitude of the individual toward his social relationships and responsibilities, but nowhere has Christ assigned the church the work of social reform. Thus, the church is not authorized to act as an Alcoholic’s Anonymous, drug rehabilitation center, Red Cross, home for unwed mothers, or an anti-gambling league. The church is not

designed for the treatment and cure of any of the social ills of this world. The Scriptures encourage Christians to eat together and associate with one another in social activities, but the home is the center of these activities, not the church (Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34). Thus, the church is not authorized to have banquets, dinners, suppers, parties, serve refreshments or to provide the place, facilities or supplies for such activities.

***The Church Can Teach Christians.*** The Lord has provided for the edification of His people. Among the gifts given unto men were evangelists, pastors and teachers, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). The focal point of edification is the word of God, as Paul commended the Ephesians “to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Those taught and baptized are to be taught to observe all things commanded by Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). Acts 20:7 finds Paul preaching the gospel to the disciples at Troas. Elders, or pastors, are exhorted, “Feed the flock of God which is among you” (1 Peter 5:2). In the church at Antioch, there were “teachers” (Acts 13:1). The church is a self-edifying body (Ephesians 4:16). There is no authority for the church to send one cent from its trea-

sury to another church for its edification or to a college to instruct and train Christians.

***The Church Cannot Provide Secular Education.*** The teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic is not the work of the church. It is common to find churches operating pre-schools, elementary, junior and senior high schools, and colleges. I just have one question: Where is the Scripture that authorizes the church to do such? I find ample authority in the New Testament for the church to teach the word of God. The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), and Jesus said, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Where do you find Scriptural authority for the church to teach the arts and sciences?

***The Church Can Relieve Needy Saints.*** In New Testament days, the church took care of its own members (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; 6:1-7), sent to other churches with benevolent needs greater than their ability to relieve (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9). This particular work of the church is very limited. There are some things an individual Christian can do that the church is not authorized to do. A good example is when Paul said, “If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church

be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed” (1 Timothy 5:16). Furthermore, there is no authority for the church to provide for the physical needs of non-Christians.

***The Church Cannot Engage in Business Enterprises.*** Where is the Scripture authorizing the church to operate a business? 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 tells how the church gets the funds to do its work. Paul penned, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” In the absence of other teaching telling how the church is to get the funds to do its work, this is the only authorized means of gathering money. By what authority do you collect money by business enterprises or other means?

If you believe the church can do some things in addition to or other than what is revealed in the New Testament, what is it that the church can do and where is the Scripture that authorizes the church to do it? No man has the right to involve the church in any program of work other than that which the Lord has plainly authorized in the New Testament.

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