

Institutionalism

Lesson 5 ñ The Autonomy of the Local Congregation

TEXT: Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:7

INTRODUCTION:

A. GOD INTENDED EACH LOCAL CONGREGATION TO BE AUTONOMOUS.

1. "Autonomous" means "self-governing."
2. Each church is responsible to Christ and his Authority alone (**Rev. 2&3**).

B. TRUE AUTONOMY DEPENDS ON TWO PRINCIPLES;

1. Each local congregation is truly independent.
2. All local congregations are truly equal.

I. GOD ORDAINED THAT CHRISTIANS BE ORGANIZED ON A LOCAL LEVEL IN LOCAL CONGREGATIONS.

A. EVERY CHURCH HAD ELDERS THAT RULED OVER ITS AFFAIRS IN HARMONY WITH THE WILL OF CHRIST(**Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17**).

B. THE JURISDICTION OF THE ELDERS IS DEFINED, THEREFORE LIMITED(**Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2**).

C. SPECIFIC INSTRUCTION EXCLUDES ANY OTHER ARRANGEMENT.

II. THE CONGREGATION WAS THE ONLY MEDIUM THROUGH WHICH THE CHURCH FUNCTIONED.

A. EACH CHURCH DID ITS OWN WORK UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF ITS OWN ELDERS.

1. It was the local church that sent out preachers (**Acts 11:22; 13:1-3**).
2. That supported preachers laboring in new fields (**Phil. 1:3-5; 4:14-20**).
3. That made up its own funds for benevolent work(**Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-2**).

B. THERE IS NOTHING WHICH GOD HAS ORDAINED THAT THE CHURCH SHOULD DO WHICH CANNOT BE CARRIED OUT THROUGH THE ONLY ORGANIZATION WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN US ñ THE CONGREGATION.

III. THE LOCAL CHURCH WAS THE ONLY INSTITUTION THROUGH WHICH CHRISTIANS WORKED IN ACCOMPLISHING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

A. PAUL JOINED HIMSELF TO THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM(**Acts 9:26**).

B. WORKING WITH THE CHURCH MEANS JOINING FORCES WITH OTHER MEMBERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH (**Rom. 12:4-5**) AND CONTINUING WITH THEM (**Acts 2:42**).

C. EACH CHURCH HAS THE RIGHT TO REFUSE FELLOWSHIP IN ITS WORK AND WORSHIP TO ANY UNWORTHY INDIVIDUAL (**Acts 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15**).

D. CHRISTIANS ARE ADMONISHED TO WORK TOGETHER, BE AT PEACE AND SUBMIT THEMSELVES TO THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST AS MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION OF WHICH THEY ARE A PART (**1 Thess. 5:11-14**).

E. AS INDIVIDUALS DO THEIR PART THE CONGREGATION FUNCTIONS (**Eph. 4:16; 2 Cor. 5:5-7**).

IV. THERE WERE NO INTER-CONGREGATIONAL ALLIANCES AMONG THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES, BUT EACH CHURCH DID ITS OWN WORK UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ITS OWN ELDERS.

A. THE JERUSALEM CHURCH TOOK CARE OF ITS OWN NEEDY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONGREGATION ITSELF (**Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37**).

B. SEVERAL CHURCHES SUPPORTED PAUL WHILE HE PREACHED IN CORINTH (**2 Cor. 11:8**) EACH CHURCH DID ITS OWN WORK IN SENDING TO PAUL BY ITS OWN MESSENGERS (**Phil. 4:14-18**).

C. WHEN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH COULD NOT HANDLE ITS OWN NEEDS, DIFFERENT CONGREGATIONS SENT MONEY TO THE ELDERS OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH THROUGH ITS OWN MESSENGERS (**Rom. 15:25-27, 31; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8:16-24**).

1. There was no pooling of funds or combining of funds under centralized control existed in New Testament days.

2. Money was always sent directly to the need from the contributing congregation (**Acts 11:30**).

V. NO CHURCH BECAME THE AGENT FOR ANOTHER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

A. ALL CHURCHES BORE AN **EQUAL** RELATIONSHIP TO WHATEVER WORK THEY COOPERATED IN DOING.

1. There were no "sponsoring churches" and contributing churches.

2. Such an arrangement creates an inequality that is wrong.

3. Such an arrangement ignores the autonomy of the local church.

B. AGENCY CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT SUBORDINATION.

1. Either the sponsoring church becomes subordinate and must bend to the whims of the contributing churches.

2. Or the contributing church becomes subordinate in that it loses control of what is supposed to be its work and money.

CONCLUSION: ONCE AGAIN, WE PLEAD FOR BOOK, CHAPTER AND VERSE FOR THESE IMPOSITIONS UPON GOD'S WORD.

A. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT DOING ALL THINGS ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN (**2 Tim. 1:13-14**).

B. GOD HAS GIVEN A PATTERN.