

*Sermon*  SNAPSHOTS



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# LOCAL CHURCH INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY

What exactly do the terms "independence" & "autonomy" mean? How do these concepts apply to local churches of Christ? This lesson will *define* these terms, *prove* them to be Biblical, & *apply* them to modern practices.

## **I. Explanations of "independence" and "autonomy"**

- A. Independent = not dependent; free from others (in terms of org. structure)
- B. If true, then a church cannot *choose* to become "dependent" for funds or oversight!
- C. Autonomous = self-ruled (this applies *only* to areas of human judgment, Jm.4:12)
- D. If true, then no local church can ever "rule" the affairs of any other local church!

## **II. Indications of "independence" and "autonomy"**

- A. *Fellowship* in the local church is controlled by local saints (Ac.9:26-28; 1Cor.5:1)
- B. *Oversight* in the local church is limited to the local saints (Ac.14:23; cf. 1Pt.5:1-3)
- C. *Treasury* in the local church is raised and controlled by local saints (1Cor.16:1-3)
- D. *No evidence of higher organization!* If this not bound, then *any* org. is OK!

## **III. Implications of "independence" and "autonomy"**

- A. If true, we cannot expand oversight or treasury beyond a *single* local church
- B. Thus, any *organization of local churches* is not authorized by Jesus! (2Jn.9)
- C. Churches pooling funds under common oversight *become a larger organization!*
- D. This results in the "organizational essence" of denominationalism! (see below)

## **IV. Violations of "independence" and "autonomy"**

- A. Denomination = "An organized group of religious congregations" (Am. Heritage)
- B. Ecumenical = An organized group of religious denominations ("unity" meetings)
- C. Sponsoring church = An organized group of churches of Christ (evangelism, etc.)
- D. Institutional church = An organized group of churches of Christ (benevolence, etc.)

**Jesus is "head over all things to the church" (Ep.1:22-23). We must respect His authority in all matters, including the organizational structure of the local church. If there's no exclusive pattern for such, then *any* organization will do!**

## MY INDIVIDUAL OBLIGATIONS TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

Even though the local church is an organized, functioning entity, it is made up of *individual saints*. Hence, the success of any local church is *directly related* to what *each member* contributes to the overall work. Each individual saint must recognize his/her obligations to the local church.

### **I. Living consistent with truth**

- A. Only faithful (loyal) saints (Christians) are to be accepted (Ac.9:26-28)
- B. Conversely, unfaithfulness is grounds for local expulsion (1Cor.5; 2Th.3)
- C. Local overseers have a primary obligation to lead in this matter (Ac.20:28-32)
- D. However, other saints also share in this obligation! (Ga.6:1-2; Hb.12:14-15)

### **II. Assembling with other saints**

- A. Yes, we can worship alone; but must also worship with others! (Jm.5:13; Ep.5:19)
- B. There is a specific command for local saints to assemble regularly (Hb.10:25)
- C. However, group size, time, and place are generic (1Cor.14:23; Ac.20:17f; Tit.2:3-5)
- D. Finally, we should WANT to assemble (no prodding; drawn by common interests)

### **III. Supporting the work financially**

- A. "Team" work NECESSITATES "team" finances in order to support it
- B. Such funds are raised according to the ability of each one (2Cor.8:12)
- C. They are gathered and used according to Divine "orders" (1Cor.16:1-3)
- D. I.e., benevolence, evangelism, edification, worship, (v.1; Ph.4:15; Ac.20:7)

#### **IV. Cooperating with other saints**

- A. We must cooperate with the leadership of the church (Hb.13:17)
- B. We must work together, vs. against each other (Ep.4:1-3; Mt.12:25)
- C. Must not quarrel over expediency (means/methods) – *surrender rights!*
- D. We must work out our individual grievances w/ each other (Mt.18:15-17)

#### **V. Giving my talents to the work**

- A. Each one has some talent to contribute to the work (Rm.12:4-8)
- B. We should volunteer to use those talents to help the overall work!
- C. And if that's true, then we shouldn't have to be "drafted" into service
- D. *So, are you contributing your part, or are you lazily coasting along?*

When a group of saints agree to work and worship as a local church "team," they can accomplish great things (cf. Ac.11:19-26). But when we refuse to cooperate, then division ensues, and great harm is done – not only to the local church, but also to the overall cause of Christ (Jn.17:20-21; 1Cor.1:10-13). Let us try to be what God wants!

### **THE NATURE & PURPOSE OF A LOCAL CHURCH TREASURY**

Can a church have a treasury? Why have one? Could it be mishandled? Let's give careful thought to this matter, for many teach error with regard to it. Some conceive of a treasury for almost any purpose (liberal). Others deny that a church should even have a treasury. But, what does the *Bible* say about a treasury in a local church?

#### **I. To understand *treasury*, must understand "church"**

- A. "Church" is a collective noun, used to describe "the people of God"
- B. A "local" church is an *organized group* of God's people (Ph.1:1; 4:15)
- C. It is a distinct, functioning body of people; *an organization of saints*
- D. They have organized for *specific and limited* purposes; a peculiar work

#### **II. To do its peculiar work, a local church requires:**

- A. Some form of "guidance mechanism" or oversight (1Tm.3:1-5)
- B. It requires servants, who act in behalf of the whole (Ac.6:1-3)
- C. *And, it requires some collective resources -- money!* (2Cor.11:8)
- D. So, the purpose of a "church treasury" treasury is to fund church work!

#### **III. The Scriptural *uses* of a church treasury:**

- A. *If authorized to act, then a church may provide whatever "expedites" such!*
- B. It may provide any "necessities" of *Bible teachers* (2Cor.11:8; Ph.4:15-16)
- C. It may provide any necessities for *worship* (1Cor.11:18,23-26; Col.3:16)
- D. It may provide any necessities of *poor saints* (1Cor.16:1-3; church limited)

#### **IV. Some possible *abuses* of a church treasury:**

- A. Local church should *raise/spend* its funds by Divine "orders" (1Cor.16:1-2)
- B. It must *control its own funds* unto the intended expenditure (1Cor.16:3)
- C. This *excludes* a "sponsoring church" to oversee multi-church funds (1Pt.5:2)
- D. Local treasury is not to be "burdened" by individual obligations (1Tm.5:16)

A "church treasury" is simply a necessary & practical means for a body of saints to function collectively. Seeing the treasury as a *means* to get things done also helps us see the need to give generously to accomplish our collective goals. The funds are entrusted to local church oversight (Ac.11:30).

**-Lanny Smith**

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