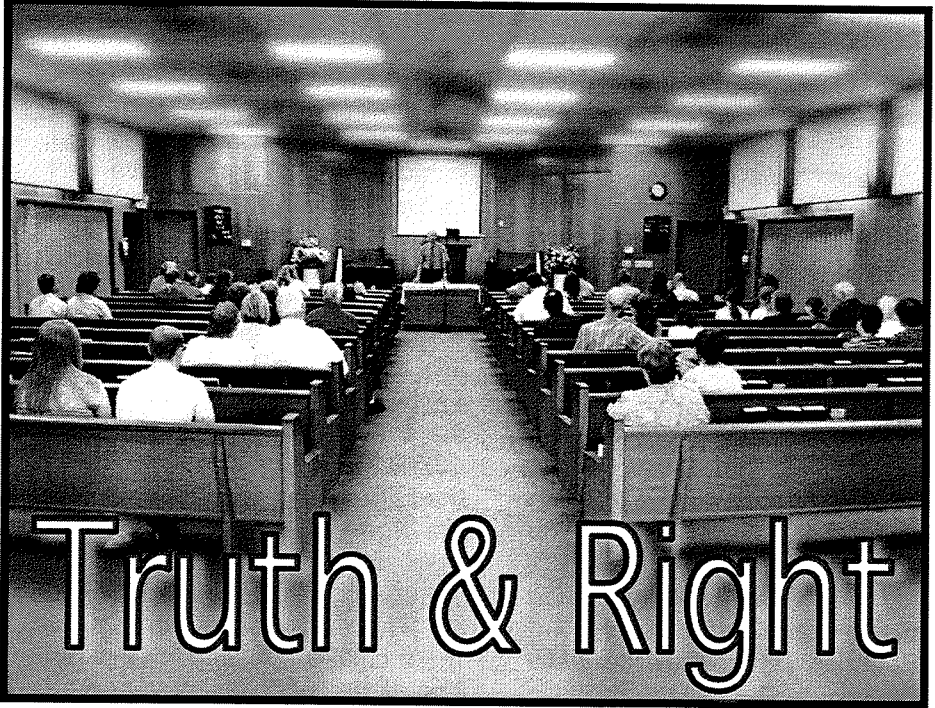


In search of...



Truth & Right

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Autonomy

Not long ago a person I was working with in an attempt to convert him from a false religion stopped me while I was presenting a statement about the independence of each congregation by exclaiming "I did not know that." After some consideration it dawned on me that there may be many people who are seeking true Biblical doctrine who were unaware of the independence of each congregation of churches of Christ. For that reason this article has been written. I do pray that some will examine my reasoning and exegesis of the Bible texts to

follow and find satisfaction (i.e. acceptance) of the Biblical doctrine of local congregational autonomy.

What does the word autonomy mean? – (Autonomy: "self-law", hence, self-governing...the right of self-government...a self-governing community.) -Autonomy =

Independence & self-government.

CHURCHES IN THE EARLY N.T. ERA WERE AUTONOMOUS:

The Biblical pattern of the early church (i.e. independent congregational government) is the only way a congregation may

organize to this very day. There is no other organizational structure revealed for the local congregation found in the New Testament.

Each Local Church Is A Complete Organization Within Itself:

Acts 14:23 – And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. KJV

Acts 20:28 – Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. KJV Phil. 1:1 – Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: KJV
CONSIDER THIS:

The organizational structure of a congregation is revealed in the three references cited above; the Biblical organization for local congregational function consists of elders, deacons, and other members.

This concept will work perfectly with each congregation wherever the congregation exists in the world. The congregation has no organizational function beyond its own ability. The ability of each congregation is determined by the size, spirituality of its members (i.e. maturity), and its financial

strength.

Each congregation is responsible to God in three areas of work:

Eph. 4:10-16 – 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

1. Evangelism – spreading and supporting the teaching of Christ.
2. Benevolence – Taking care of the congregation's needy.
3. Edification of itself – building up the membership of the congregation (i.e. aiding the members to grow – mature in the

faith).

The above three areas of work assigned by the Lord for the congregation when performed to the extent of their ability with their resources is authorized, pleasing to the Lord, and completely acceptable to God.

Through the above process each congregation is acceptable to God.

I know of no Biblical teaching that authorized a plurality of elders in one church to assume or accept the responsibility of a sister congregation's work; either in part or the whole.

The concept of sponsoring elderships, congregational interlinking such as is current in the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and many others religious organizations pursuing unauthorized means and methods to activate the universal church (i.e. all the members throughout the world or all the churches throughout the world) is without Biblical support.

CONSIDER THIS:

Any system or any organizational arrangement that is not authorized by the Bible is unacceptable to our Lord. Anything that is unauthorized by our Lord via the Holy Scriptures that is practiced by man is sinful. There is no other statement that will adequately define this departure from the Biblical pattern; this is transgression of God's instruction.

SEE ALSO THE FOLLOWING BIBLICAL REFERENCES:

Jesus Christ is the only Head of the Universal Church and

has not delegated any authority to any man or men to take His place while he sits at the throne of the Father in Heaven.

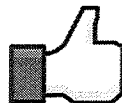
Matt. 28:18-20 – And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. KJV

Eph. 1:22-23 – 22 and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all. KJV

Col. 3:15-17 – 15 and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. KJV

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Psalm Forty-Eight

A B N M W V D Q K V Q F H R F V E K A C
F A N U S V T N J G S M Y B U S I V I J
H G A P M N Z S M B A S T O U N D E D W
M O U N T A I N E T K Y S N S L J X I Q
X Y H B E G O S A L R I S P X F N G P R
U R F X M A N Q R R U O M O H I G Z U Y
V S R E P V O W T E S T A B L I S H U I
K Q N K L W X X H Q G X L B D V Z D I D
I H K D E K M D C L F O R E V E R Z Z Q
W T F T L Y X E K Q Q A S Q D V C J H X
H I H A B M N M T X T R E M B L I N G K
X L Q M T P I F F N M S B I R M T W E N
W B U M J O A J I R D P K D I W A P R D
I D L Y U L M N D A U O I A J X D B E K
G S W F O O D V F M M R R S L E E T J V
C H U Z Y E O Z P P Q O G Z O G L G O I
T C Y S N E P J O A P W T Q U I S E I E
X F K G S O E G A R V M X N O G G T C B
O X I P C L U R R T O R D P R A I S E D
T U F A O Q T R P S X K R H D K L Z S S
Q J S K U S E D W U U F S U O O W U C R

- The Lord is "greatly to be praised" (vs. 1)
- His holy mountain is beautiful in elevation (vs. 1-2)
- Within her citadels God has made Himself known (vs. 3)
- When the kings saw it, they were astounded (vs. 5)
- Trembling took hold of them there (vs. 6)
- The city God will establish forever (vs. 8)
- They had thought of God's love in the midst of His temple (vs. 9)
- God's praise reaches to the ends of the earth (vs. 10)
- Let the daughters of Judah rejoice (vs. 11)
- Walk about Zion, and number her towers (vs. 12)
- Consider well her ramparts, and tell of them (vs. 13)
- That God will guide us forever (vs. 14)