

Fundamentals Of The Church

The Autonomy Of The Church

(Ro 16:16)

INTRODUCTION

1. Good Morning
 - a. Greeting...
2. Series of lessons on "The Fundamentals Of The Church."
 - a. We have looked at a great number of lessons.
 - b. Last week we looked at "The Second Coming."
 - i. What the Bible, not man, says about Jesus' return.
 - c. Today we are going to look at what it means to say "the church is autonomous."
3. Autonomy
 - a. Webster's defines autonomy as, " 1 :the quality or state of being self-governing especially : the right of self-government 2 :self-directing freedom and especially moral independence 3 :a self-governing state" (Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary. (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc.)
 - b. There are few if any real autonomous denominations that I know of. There are many that claim such (Southern Baptist) however just try and go against the "norm."
 - i. "The leadership of HHBC [Henderson Hills Baptist Church] had hoped to put a resolution before the congregation for a vote to change the church bylaws to allow unbaptized individuals or those baptized by other modes, specifically sprinkling, to join the church...According to Wes Kenney, a SBC pastor from Valiant, the resolution implied that an affirmative vote from HHBC would lead to a proposal that the CBA remove the church from the association. Writing on his blog, Kenney said, "I believe that the proposal on which they are voting is an error, and if they affirm it I will advocate their removal from our fellowship, so foundational is this doctrine." The doctrine Kenney is citing is the belief, ensconced in the Baptist Faith and Message, the SBC's creedal statement from 2000, that to become a member of a Baptist church an individual must first be baptized by immersion following a confession of faith. Henderson Hills had hoped to create a second-tier membership that did not extend privileges of leadership and teaching to the unbaptized members." (Baptist Brouhaha article)
4. The Bible does give us many clues into the government of the church and thus the idea of autonomy so let us consider what God has to say on this subject.

I. The Government Of The Church

- A. Bishops, deacons, saints
 1. **Ph 1:1** "Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons"¹
 2. As one can see there are only groups of people in the church.

¹ All scriptures are taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

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B. Saint

1. Every Christian is a saint according to God.
 - i. **I Co 1:2** "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours"
 - ii. **I Co 14:33** "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."
2. Therefore both elders and deacons are saints.
 - i. Saint can be properly defined as such, " persons who belong to God, and as such constitute a religious entity—‘God’s people.’" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (124). New York: United Bible societies.)

C. Deacons

1. Though every Christian is a saint not every saint is an appointed deacon.
 - i. There are qualifications for deacons.
 - a. **I Ti 3:8-13**
2. Deacons are not elders in waiting.
 - i. Though they are appointed and thusly have qualifications they are simply that based on leading in service their area given to them.
 - ii. This does not mean they are over the congregation in anyway. They are still subject to the elders.

D. Pastors

1. Though every Christian is a saint and some are appointed deacons only those who fit the qualifications can be elders/pastors/bishops.
 - i. Their qualifications are many not few.
 - a. **I Ti 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-16; Ac 20:28; I Pt 5:1-11...**

II. The Church Government Implies Autonomy

- A. Now Elders/Pastors/Bishops [which are the same thing] are the leaders of a congregation
 1. The Bible makes this very clear Elders are to rule the congregation.
 - i. **He 13:7, 17** "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct...17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."
 - ii. **I Pt 5:5** "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility."
- B. Elders/Shepherds/Overseers are not leaders of multiple congregations
 1. Notice elders were appointed in every congregation.
 - i. **Ac 14:23** "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

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- ii. **Ti 1:5** "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you"
- C. Elders/Overseers/Pastors had no authority over other congregations
- 1. "The elders in each locality had specific responsibilities to teach, oversee, rule, and be examples to the flock of God under their care. Each congregation functioned with a plurality of elders. The elders in one city, or congregation, had no responsibility or authority in another city. Likewise, all elders in a congregation had equal responsibility and authority in that congregation." (Each Local New Testament Church Is Self-Governing Under Christ by Alexander, Wallace; <http://tinyurl.com/3d5txdm>)
 - i. There is no biblical evidence for overseers of one congregation telling another congregation what to do in the matters of expedience.
 - ii. Every eldership is designed by God to follow God's Will. That means that every faithful congregation will be the same in the acts of worship, their goals, and so forth. God has already legislated these things. However there are areas of expedience that the shepherds are to exercise their wisdom as they use the guideline of scripture (**Co 3:17**).
 - a. Expedience is the authority given to elders to make decisions. "If God specifies the obligation, but does not specify the details with regard to how the obligation is to be met, then we are authorized to involve human judgment." (Ascertaining Bible Authority by Deaver, Roy pg. 63)
 - iii. Thus one set of pastors cannot tell another set of elders what to do in areas of expedience however one set of overseers can tell another set of shepherds what they should do if a set has fallen away from truth (**Ac 15:22-32**). They cannot force them the wayward eldership to obey God they can only plead with them to do such.
 - 2. Notice the Macedonian church could not force the Corinthian church to give as they had beyond their means.
 - i. **II Co 8:1-8** "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. 8 **I speak not by commandment**, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others." (emphasis mine)

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- ii. **II Co 8:13-14** "For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; 14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality."
3. Church history proves out that autonomy was not ended until much later.
 - i. It wasn't until later you have the rise of a monarchical bishop placed over the elders of a congregation. As larger congregations sent missionaries out around them and congregations were started these monarchical bishops took those new congregations in as a parent to child relationship at first but this in effect ended autonomy. Now you had multiple congregations under one monarchical bishop and one set of elders.

CONCLUSION

1. We could continue with more examples however this is sufficient to get the point across.
 - a. God knew in His infinite wisdom that if there were a single governing body or person over every congregation or even over more than one then that governing body could lead more than their particular congregation astray. This has already been seen...see Catholicism's growth and departure from truth as it moved just about if not every congregation away from the New Testament church.
2. Brothers and sisters let us rejoice in God's wisdom and meditate on His knowledge.
3. Invitation
 - a. God's Plan of Salvation
 - i. Hear/Study **Rom 10:17; II Tim 2:15**
 - ii. Believe Jesus Is The Christ **Jn 3:16; 8:24**
 - iii. Repent/Turn To God **Ac 17:30; Lk 24:47**
 - iv. Confess Jesus As Lord **Mt 10:32; Rom 10:9**
 - v. Immersed For The Forgiveness of Sins **Ac 2:38; 22:16; I Pt 3:21**
 - vi. Live A Faithful Life **I Jn 1:7; Eph 5:8**