

## The Church

### Lesson 8

Independence Autonomy and  
Cooperation of Local Churches

## The Church

1. What Is The Church?
2. Nature of The Universal Church
3. Organization and Work of The Universal Church
4. The Only Source of Divine Authority Today
5. Establishing Divine Authority

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## The Church

6. Nature of A Local Church
7. Organization and Work of A Local Church
8. Independence Autonomy and Cooperation of Local Churches
9. Institutionalism and The Social Gospel

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## Organization and Work of A Local Church

1. What is a local church?
2. How is a local church organized?
3. The work of individual Christians and a local church are different
4. What is the work of a local church?

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## What Is The Work of A Local Church?

1. Regularly assemble to worship God and work together
2. Partake of the Lord's supper every Sunday
3. Sing without mechanical instruments
4. Pray
5. Preach and teach the Word of God
6. Collect money every Sunday
7. Support preachers and elders
8. Help needy saints
9. Discipline erring members

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## Introduction

- Many ask "How can we get all the congregations to work together?"
- That is, how do we get the local churches to cooperate in evangelism, edification and benevolence?
- Before we can answer this question, we must understand that each local church is to be independent and autonomous

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## Introduction

- Can local churches cooperate in such ways that they do not compromise their independence or autonomy?
- Denominations implement cooperation of local churches through centralization
- Many churches of Christ have also followed suit centralizing the work of many local churches through sponsoring churches or man-made institutions

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## Introduction

- Although they tell us that more work is done more efficiently, the question is, are these centralized cooperation plans authorized by the apostles' teaching?
- Or, is there a way that local churches can cooperate without centralizing oversight and treasury and still accomplish the work God has authorized us to do?

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## Local Churches Must Be Independent And Autonomous

- Neither independence or autonomy are found in the New Testament
- But, when we see the meanings of these words, we find the concepts within the New Testament
- Based on the evidence, we necessarily infer that these are characteristics of each local church

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## Independent

- Not dependent (reliant) on another for anything that is needed to function
- In other words, local churches do not depend on others for funds, oversight or anything else that is needed for their work

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## Autonomous

- Self directed, not subject to the control of outside forces
- Self-governing, not dependent on the laws or supervision of another organization

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

- Each local church is to have its own overseers, qualified elders
- Their rule is restricted to the local church among them
- Therefore, it is sinful for elders to extend their oversight beyond a local church

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

ACT 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1PE 5:2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

- In matters of judgment, elders are free to decide among a number of acceptable alternatives
- For example, time of worship and number of worship assemblies each week
- But, when God specifically requires something, it must be followed without adding or subtracting from it

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

COL 3:17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

- Local churches may only have a local treasury
- A treasury is a storage of money, a medium of exchange through which local church work is done

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

1CO 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

1CO 16:2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

- The only time one or several local churches sent funds to one or several local churches was when saints in the receiving churches were in need
- That is, they needed daily food, clothing, shelter and medical care
- When their need was met, the funds stopped

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

ACT 24:17 "Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;

2Co 8:13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—

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## Evidence For Independent, Autonomous Local Churches

2Co 8:14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality;

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## Independence Safeguards A Local Church From Error

- Local churches that practice independence and autonomy are protected more against error
- If local churches are centralized together in some way, error tends to spread more easily and quickly to many local churches
- Centralization of local churches is error
- No church or group of churches can force any local church to teach or practice error

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## Independence Safeguards A Local Church From Error

ACT 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

ACT 20:29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

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## Independence Safeguards A Local Church From Error

ACT 20:30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

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## Is Acts 15 Proof of Centralization?

- Does Acts 15 reveal a convention of local churches where decisions were made for all local churches?
- Problem – false teachers from Jerusalem spread error to other churches
- Error – Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved
- Result – Paul and Barnabas had much conflict with them

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## Jerusalem False Teachers Spread Error Through Galatia

ACT 15:1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

ACT 15:2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

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## Paul and Barnabas Divinely Directed To Go To Jerusalem

GAL 2:2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

GAL 2:3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

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## Paul and Barnabas Divinely Directed To Go To Jerusalem

GAL 2:4 But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

GAL 2:5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.

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## By The Holy Spirit The Apostles Confirm The Gospel and Condemn False Teachers

ACT 15:24 "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,

ACT 15:25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

ACT 15:26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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## By The Holy Spirit The Apostles Confirm The Gospel and Condemn False Teachers

ACT 15:27 "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.

ACT 15:28 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

ACT 15:29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

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## Is Acts 15 Proof of Centralization?

- There was no new teaching that came out of this meeting in Jerusalem
- Also, those who met were not representatives from various local churches
- Acts 15 shows that some of the apostles met together privately and with the local church at Jerusalem publicly
- Acts 15 does not show that local churches can meet together to decide anything

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## Independence Autonomy and Cooperation of Local Churches

1. Local churches must be independent and autonomous
2. Independence safeguards a local church from error
3. Is Acts 15 proof of centralization?

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## Two Types of Cooperation

- Cooperate - to work or act together toward a common end or purpose
- Cooperation can either be collective or concurrent
- One is authorized by the Word of God and the other is not

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## Collective Cooperation Not Authorized By The Apostles' Teaching

- Collective cooperation - a number of people or organizations are collected together into some centralized, organized arrangement to accomplish a certain goal
- Goal is attained through centralized oversight and treasury
- Both denominations and many churches of Christ practice this method of cooperation
- Nowhere found in the apostles' teaching

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## Concurrent Cooperation Authorized By The Apostles' Teaching

- When a number of people or organizations work independently to accomplish a common goal
- Goal attained without centralized oversight and treasury
- Each local church makes their own decisions about how much will be spent and to whom it will be sent
- The apostles' teaching authorizes concurrent cooperation

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## An Example of Unauthorized Collective Cooperation of Local Churches

- Any plan or method designed to collect local churches together under centralized leadership so they can act as "one" is unauthorized
- Local churches should never allow another local church or human organization to oversee their decisions or funds
- These methods result in unauthorized collective cooperation

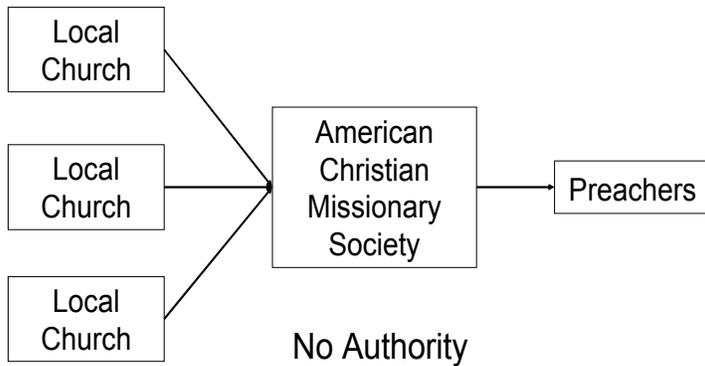
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## American Christian Missionary Society - 1849

- Promoted by Alexander Campbell who had once taught against such centralization of local churches
- Formed in Cincinnati, Ohio
- Local churches sent funds to society
- Society then distributed funds to preachers who were sent out to evangelize
- What is wrong with this?

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## Local Churches Centralizing Oversight and Funds Not Authorized



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## Individual Christians Are The Working Units of Jesus' Universal Church

1Co 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

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## Only Local Oversight Authorized

Act 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1Pe 5:2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

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## Only Local Treasury Authorized

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

1Co 16:2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

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## Only Sending Funds Directly To Preachers Authorized

2Co 11:8 I robbed other churches by taking wages *from them* to serve you;

2Co 11:9 and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

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## Examples Of Authorized Concurrent Cooperation of Local Churches

- Local churches set faithful example influencing others to imitate them
- Local churches may assist each other in various ways
- Local churches may independently cooperate with one another by supporting preachers and helping needy saints
- No sign of one local church overseeing other local churches or churches working through centralized organizations

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## Thessalonian Church A Faithful Example For Others To Follow

1Th 1:6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

1Th 1:7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

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## Thessalonian Church A Faithful Example For Others To Follow

1Th 1:8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

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## Thessalonian Church Followed The Example of The churches In Judea

1Th 2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews,

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## The Church At Rome Assisted Phoebe A Member of The Church At Cenchrea

Rom 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

Rom 16:2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

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## Cooperation In Distributing Apostolic Letters

COL 4:16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

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## Cooperation In Assisting Brethren In Traveling

3JO 1:5 ¶ Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers;

3JO 1:6 and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

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## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Supporting Preachers

Php 4:15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;

Php 4:16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

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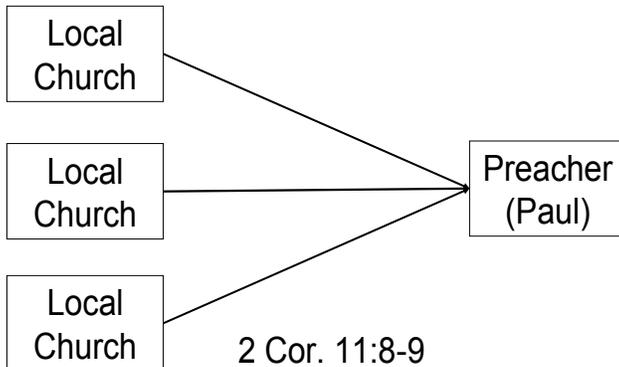
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2Co 11:9 and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

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## Local Churches Concurrently Cooperated To Support Paul



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## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Helping Needy Saints

Rom 15:25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints.

Rom 15:26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

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## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Helping Needy Saints

2Co 8:10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.

2Co 8:11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

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## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Helping Needy Saints

2Co 9:2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

2Co 9:3 But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared;

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## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Helping Needy Saints

2Co 9:4 otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we--not to speak of you--will be put to shame by this confidence.

2Co 9:5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

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## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Helping Needy Saints

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

1Co 16:2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

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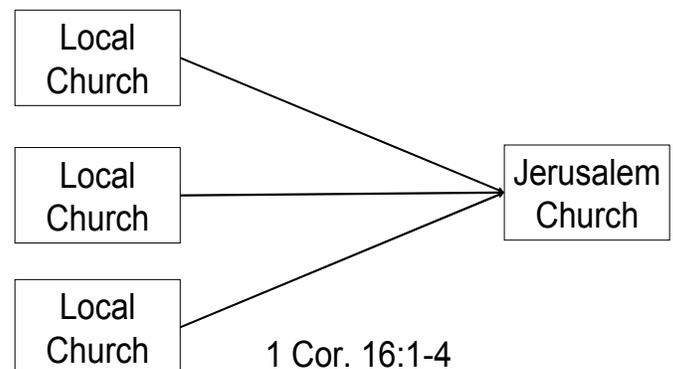
## Local Churches Can Cooperate In Helping Needy Saints

1Co 16:3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

1Co 16:4 and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

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## Local Churches Concurrently Cooperated To Help Needy Saints



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## Independence Autonomy and Cooperation of Local Churches

1. Local churches must be independent and autonomous
2. Independence safeguards a local church from error
3. Is Acts 15 proof of centralization?
4. Two types of cooperation
5. An example of unauthorized collective cooperation of local churches
6. Examples of authorized concurrent cooperation of local churches

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