

The Church

Independence and Cooperation

One of the key distinctive of a Baptist church is that they are independent and autonomous. But that does not mean that they are incapable of fellowship and cooperation with other churches.

- I. Independence of Local Churches
 - A. A church is a local assembly of believers - Galatians 1:2, Revelation 1:11
 - B. Each local congregation is free to govern itself according to its own conscience and the guides of the Spirit and the Scripture.
 - C. Examples:
 1. Each church has its own leadership - Acts 14:23, I Peter 5:1-3
 2. Each congregation exercises its own church discipline - I Corinthians 5:1-13
- II. Cooperation of Local Churches
 - A. Just because churches are independent and autonomous does not mean that they cannot work together
 - B. Example of Spiritual Liberty
 1. In Christ, we as individuals have tremendous liberty - John 8:36
 2. It is possible to misuse that liberty - Galatians 5:13
 3. Although we have individual liberty, that does not mean that fellowship is not needed or commanded - Hebrews 10:25
 4. In fact, we hurt ourselves by isolating ourselves
 5. LIKEWISE: independent, local churches can and should have fellowship with other likeminded independent, local churches.
 - C. Examples from Corinth
 1. In giving
 - a) Paul wrote to the church at Corinth concerning giving in cooperation with other churches - 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15
 - b) Paul DOES NOT command them to give, but exhorts them to - 2 Corinthians 8:8-9
 - c) Therefore, it is expedient and proper for churches to work together in the pooling of resources to further accomplish the work of God.
 2. In workers
 - a) Titus had arrived to minister at Corinth
 - b) Note his recommendation is from the *churches* - 2 Corinthians 8:18-19
 - c) Therefore, it is expedient and proper for churches to aid each other through the work of their ministers
 3. In support
 - a) Paul states that his work in Corinth was financially supported by other churches - 2 Corinthians 11:7-8
 - b) Therefore, it is expedient and proper for churches to support works that aid other churches.
 - D. Example of the Council of Acts 15
 1. Many people falsely point to this incident as an example of church hierarchy

2. The rise of the false doctrine needed to be dealt with - Acts 15:1
 3. In order to help settle this, Paul and Barnabas are sent, voluntarily and not compulsorily, for counsel to Jerusalem - Acts 15:2
 4. The decision that is arrived at is disseminated, not commanded, to other churches - Acts 15:23
- E. Basis for Cooperation
1. That the churches be likeminded
 2. That they participate as equals
 3. That all cooperation be voluntary