

[Sunday, November 20, 2016] The Church Series, The Nature of the Church – Craig Thurman

The Nature of the Church

The church is a living organism; the church is local; the church is independent; and the church is self-governing, or autonomous.

The Church is a Living Organism

A church, this church, and the churches are living organisms. In God's Word the church, a church is referred to as if it were a person, and in sense it is. A church is the present, living manifestation of Jesus Christ during the time of His physical absence on earth. This being the case, a church experiences the same things in the world as her Lord and Master experienced. As He was in this world, so she is.

Jn.15.18 ¶ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

Jn.17.8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

..

10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.

11 ¶ And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

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12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 ¶ Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

It should be obvious to all who *watchful* that the church is not the prosperous, mega-, popular entity that the world follows after. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a suffering, rejected, despised, small flock in comparison to what we see in Christendom. Christendom is an aberrant growth from that which was in its origin a pure religion. It is not a proper representative of the Lord's true churches.

Lk.13.18 ¶ Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?

19 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

20 And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?

21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

As living organisms churches may suffer, live, or die, grow in grace or fall from grace, grow or decline in membership, might be dedicated to the truth or apostatize from it.

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Alive or dead:

*Re 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that **thou livest, and art dead.***

Growth in grace:

*2Pe 3:18 But **grow** in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

Fallen from grace:

Ga 5:4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Addition of members:

*Ac 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved.*

Loss of members:

*Jn.6.66 From that time many of his disciples **went back**, and walked no more with him.*

Stand fast:

1Co 16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

Apostacy:

*Re 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because **thou hast left thy first love.***

A church may be troubled and persecuted, suffer and rest, and be at peace;

*Ga 5:12 I would they were even cut off which **trouble you.***

*Ac 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great **persecution against the church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

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*Re.2.10 Fear none of those things which **thou shalt suffer**: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

*Ac 9:31 Then had the churches **rest** throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

*1Th 5:13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And **be at peace** among yourselves.*

A church can be glorious in works or shameful:

Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Re 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

A church may be preserved, or it may become indifferent:

*Re 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, **I also will keep thee** from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*

Re 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

A church is to be fed. (Acts 20.28) It is to be cared for. (1Ti.3.5) It is nourished and cherished by the Lord Jesus Christ just as a husband would care for his own wife. (Eph.5.29, 30) A church can communicate and help others. (Phl. 4.15)

These are things that are said of church.

These, who have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and have received Baptist baptism, and either purpose to join together with others of like experience, or join themselves to a covenanted collective of the saints of God which are located in one place, whose Head is only Jesus Christ, are a church.

A church is a living organism which acts in the place of her Lord during the time of his absence.

The Church is Local

Like a human body with its various parts functions in ways which contributes to the welfare of the whole body, all subject to that which flows from the head, so is the church of Christ. Every church that is properly ordered has members which provide for the welfare of the whole body as it is subject to its Head, Jesus Christ.

*Eph.4.7 But unto **every one of us** is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (context, men of the body, v.4)

...

11 And he gave some (... gifts to men, of the body, which are...) apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

These are only notable gifts which serve for the good of the body, but do not miss the point, that there is given to every one of us a measure of *grace* (v.7) to serve ... in the church where we are. As a member of this church there are no 'nobodies.' Every member has grace to edify this church.

12 For (πρός, to) the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

The basic statement is (vss. 7, 11): Christ gave [gifts] which goal is the perfecting of the saints ...

13 *Till*

Till ... the adverb which tells us *how long* we have a *need* for these gifts ... babies have great need. They are not able to make contributions which preserve the family. But as babies grow they become less needy, more independent, and make contributions which help the family. When a baby comes to maturity he becomes an independent member of the household with every other matured member. So, as this works in a family unit, it is for the church.

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 fulness of Christ:

It is the mature who help the babes in Christ to grow into the image of Christ. With growth it becomes less needy, more independent, and able to contribute to the *building up* of the body.

14 *That*

(vs.15) Christ gave the gifts with *the purpose* of establishing every member in the truth, communicate it in love, and grow up in Christ in all of the experiences of life.

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 (ἐκ, of, the source, the authority) whom (Christ) the whole body [is] fitly joined [framed, 2.21] 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.

A church must be local. The spiritual nature of the church no more negates the local aspect of the Lord's churches than my spiritual nature negates the reality of my physical presence here before you today. I live here, and in this moment I am

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in this place. I cannot live simultaneously in two places. A church cannot be meeting in two places at once. Can a church meet in Alaska and Texas at the same time?

*1Co 11:20 When ye come together therefore into **one place**, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.*

*1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into **one place** ...*

Churches which have members which cannot receive for their needs, and that cannot contribute to the edification of the body do not practice the doctrine of the local church. Yet many Baptist churches only pay lip service to the doctrine of the local church because they have members that are scattered all over the world.

1Co 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

What did Paul say? He said that the analogy of the human body is applicable to the church body. A physical body cannot be divided from itself and remain that same body, any more than the members of a church can be divided from a church and be that very same body. Take a member, sever it from the body, and once you transplant it to another body it is that body's member. It has association with another body. Sever a finger, or a toe, or a leg, or an arm, but once it is disconnected from my body it no longer constitutes a part of me. Those separated members no long contribute to the welfare of my body. If they do not soon become reattached to either the body to which it originally belonged, or to some other body, a transplant, it will corrupt. Why? As the *life* of the flesh, the body, is in the blood, so there must be a viable connection between every member and Jesus Christ, *who is our life* (Col.3.4), and that connection is being a part of His body, the N.T. church.

The Word of God only acknowledges a local church. What constitutes a local church?

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Mt 18:20 For where (notice local, where refers to a place) two or three (the smallest number) are gathered together in my name (on the authority of Jesus Christ alone), there am I in the midst of them.

First, notice the adverb . It is modifying the verb *are gathered*. A church must be able to come together somewhere and meet. So, can two come together into one place and meet as a church, one being in New York City, NY, and the other in Anchorage, Alaska? Does Skype or FaceTime provide the means for this to be a possibility? If so, why wouldn't a television church suffice? And then, why not a radio church? Today we can listen to audio or watch video of many great preachers of God's Word in the church. Why can't this be *my church*?

Second, notice that this Scripture says two or three, plus the Lord; not one plus the Lord. One plus the Lord is not a church. There is no such thing as a gathering together of one. There is no such thing as a church of one. Regretfully some believers show either their ignorance of the Word of God or how much they despise the Lord Jesus and His church when they say something like, 'My church is me and God.' That is not the definition that the Bible gives for a church. And if our definition of a church disagrees with the Bible we are in error.

Third, what does it mean when we read that these two or three gather *in my name*, εἰς τὸ ἔμὸν ὄνομα? Does it mean that because a group with as few as two or three participants which come together and use the name of Jesus, perhaps in a gospel concert (be it the best gospel music concert that there might be), or in a prayer meeting in the office or hospital environment, or while attending a Christian play that this is a legitimate church gathering? I do not deny that there might be church members present in any of these venues, but a church is never defined so loosely in the Word of God.

To gather together in the name of Christ is to be gathered because He authorizes them to do so. A church congregates by His authority, ἐξουσία. In other words, we gather because He gave us the *right* to gather together. To have the right to gather in His name means that we are in a state which represents His cause, and not our own. (There is no way to communicate the right to others. That right is the sole prerogative of the Authority.)

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As long as that church, which received the *right, grant, authority* of the Lord to be His commissioners continues in the truth they may carry on. However, the churches are warned to keep those things that are delivered to them, else they could suffer judgment of the Lord, and even be removed before Him as His church.

Re 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Re 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

No *group* can have the authority of Christ if they have not first been arranged after the pattern of Scripture. And so what is that pattern? We have already mentioned this, but we will give it again in other words:

Each person must have professed a personal faith in Jesus Christ. They have believed the gospel concerning Jesus Christ's coming, burial, death and resurrection. They see in Jesus Christ's the only remedy for sin against God.

Each believer must have received John's Baptism. That means that they have received Baptist baptism. These have received baptism at the hands of a church which is *under* the authority of Christ.

And each baptized believer must be received by the corporate decision of the church of which they wish to join.

These are all shown in the text of Mt. 28-18-20. Under the authority of Christ the church has received her commission to preach to the nations, baptize those who come to faith in Christ, and teach them as they continue in a N.T. church relationship.

Churches are local. Churches always meet in places. If they cannot meet in some place the very nature of that church is compromised. The first church of our Lord Jesus Christ were with Christ wherever He went. After His resurrection and ascension the church began to gather together in *appointed* places. The first

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church at Jerusalem met in an upper room. (Acts 1.13) At Pentecost she met in the temple. (Acts 2.46) Once the church became churches they met in various buildings and houses. (Acts 20.6, an upper chamber; Ro.16.3-5; 1Co.16.19, Prisca and Aquilla's house) The church was not the building but the saints that had gathered together which made up that church.

With a local church the whole church may become involved in her work, no matter how big or small. For example, a *whole church* can send a greeting to another church.

*Ro 16:23 Gaius mine host, and of **the whole church**, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.*

A *whole church* can send some of its members to another place where there is another *whole church*.

*Ac 15:22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren*
...

This passage in Acts chapter 15 shows us the local nature of a church. There were churches simultaneously in many places at that time. They were in Judaea, Galilee, Samaria, Caesarea, Tarsus, Antioch, and many churches at that time in the country which is now called Turkey.

Every church in the New Testament was addressed as a local church. A universal church cannot receive a letter. In the N.T. there is not a single epistle written that was not directed to a specific church or to specific churches. (Comp. These letters were either written to a church or to churches. any more than it can be corrected or judged. We read of the church at Ephesus, the churches of Galatia, the church at Cenchrea, the church in this house or that house (cf. Ro.16.5; Phile. 2), the churches of the gentiles, the church at Corinth, and of the seven churches which were in Asia. To assume that there is any other kind of church than a local church is to superimpose a nature to it which is not there. Churches live and die independently, are chastened independently. To judge one church for the false doctrines of another would be an injustice. My opinion is that many who read the

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gospels, and especially the early parts of the Book of Acts which related to the church confuse the nature of the church because of the infancy stage the early church went through. After the resurrection of our the church of our Lord became known as the church which was at Jerusalem.

*Ac 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against **the church which was at Jerusalem**; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

There is no other kind of church in the New Testament. A church should be able to receive members and dismiss members, and thereby make judgments concerning others; therefore its nature must only be local.

*Ac 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved.*

*Ac 6:7 And the word of God increased; and **the number of the disciples multiplied** in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

*1Co 5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore **put away from among yourselves that wicked person**.*

*3Jo 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, **receiveth us** not.*

*10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, **and casteth them out of the church**.*

In order for a church to know its members and be able to contribute to the personal edification of itself she must be local. Its members are accountable to one another.

Ac 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty ...

*1Th 5:13 ... And **be at peace among yourselves.***

Eph.4.1 ¶ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 ¶ With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The clear witness of Scripture is that a church is local.

The Church is Independent

Each church is an individual church. Each church, like a living body, is an independent life. Each church can be like other churches yet they can be different from each other, but they remain separate churches because each has a life of their own. Churches may interact and enjoy fellowship with other churches, but they remain independent, distinct churches. Officers of one church are not officers of another.

Tit 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee ...

Acts 14.21 And when they (Paul [v.19], Barnabas [v.20]) had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

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.

If ever there were a missionary letter, Titus is that letter. Like Paul and Barnabas, Titus would come into a city, preach the gospel of Christ, baptize those converted which had come to Christ in faith, form of them a N.t church, and teach those disciples how to conduct themselves as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then,

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Titus having set them up in *gospel order* would move into the next city. Acts chapter 14 shows us the independence of the churches as they related to each other. This is important. Churches cannot dictate to other churches what they can do or not do. Churches have no power whatsoever to either give or to decline authority to another church. Christ is the authority or He is not. He dictates when there is, and when there is no longer a church. Churches who act in this capacity have usurped the very authority of Christ Himself. The notion of *missions, chapels, and mother churches* is an indication of such usurpation.

Notice now the independence and the cooperation that there can be between true churches.

Acts 14.26 And thence sailed (Paul and Barnabas) to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended

παραδεδομένοι, pt. pf. pass. of παραδίωμι, KJV, also *delivered, committed*)

to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

*27 And when they were come, and had **gathered the church together,***

A church is still a church whether it is assembled or not. A church cannot be gathered together unless it is a church, and then that church can come together as a whole church into one place.

they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

15.1 ¶ And certain men which came down

Certain men. They knew who these men were. And they came down to the church in Antioch.

from Judaea

These men had come from the Jerusalem church and misrepresented themselves and the church there. (15.24)

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taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

*2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they (this is church at Antioch) determined that Paul and Barnabas, and **certain other of them**, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders (of that church) about this question.*

3 And being brought on their way by the church (of Antioch), they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

... of the churches in those areas.

*4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, **they were received of the church**,*

So, there is *the church* of Antioch (14.27), and there is *the church* of Jerusalem. Each church is a church of Jesus Christ, independent of the other.

and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

...

6 ¶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Here is a conference of churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. Is there anything wrong with churches coming together to help decide in matters of importance? But the final decision rests with each church, not the conference itself.

*22 ¶ Then pleased it the apostles and elders, **with the whole church** (of Jerusalem), to send chosen men of their own company*

Meaning, of their own membership in the Jerusalem church.

to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

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23 *And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:*

24 *Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:*

25 *It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord,*

'being assembled with one accord,' Or, having come to one mind; that is the apostles, elders, and the whole church with Paul, Barnabas, and certain other of the church at Antioch ...

to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 *Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

27 *We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.*

...

30 *So when they were dismissed (or, loosed from the church at Jerusalem), they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:*

31 *Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.*

32 *And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. (the ability to fellowship in the Spirit among the churches)*

33 *And after they (Judas and Silas) had tarried there a space, they were let go (virtually the same Gr. in v.30, aor. pass, when ... were dismissed) in peace from the brethren (of the church at Antioch) unto the apostles (from where they came in Jerusalem).*

Its members, its officers, its doctrine, and its practices are its own. Each church knows who its members are, what they will do or not do together, who its servants might be, and what they believe that the Word of God teaches. The Word of God teaches clearly that churches should be independent entities. Failing in this point does not necessarily negate the reality of a church, but this steps away from the truth of God's Word and either overly constrains other churches, or the fellowship that could have been between them.

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Also, every church is judged independently by the Lord. There is not a general sweeping judgment of the Lord upon 'the church.' Nowhere is such a doctrine promoted in the New Testament.

The messages to the seven churches of the book of Revelation say as much.

Re.1.4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

Re 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

The Lord Jesus wanted each church to know, not only their own condition, but also that of the fellow churches.

The apostle John wrote by commandment of the Lord to the seven churches. Why didn't he write to *the church* instead? A *glaring* omission in the Word of God is that we never read of the *general tenor* of the state of the church. Every universal church advocate should note this well. That *kind of church* is a foreign concept in the Word of God. The universal church notion violates the very independent nature of the Lord's New Testament church. But isn't that the purpose for a universal church? Men in the very early centuries desired to lord over the churches. This is the concept which opens this door.

3Jo 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

The universal church doctrine erodes the independence and distinctive, personal identity of a church. It diminishes the ties of the membership to one another. The result is that the members think *less* of a church and *more* of an ideology. It is an

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hyper-church view which has all but superseded the Lord's true church. And so there are popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, arch diocese, diocese, conventions, association, synods, fellowships, et al. This church itself is powerless. The church which comes into this doctrine is subject to another head which is not Christ. If the powers that be say homosexuals are to be installed in the pulpit that is what it does. If this church says that homosexual marriage is alright, this church must follow suit. If this church pronounces a particular doctrine to be anathema, those churches subject to this power must subject itself. But let's be clear. There is no such thing as 'the church of American'; or, 'the world church.' Rather, there are churches that are living, some are dying, and some are died. There are churches that are healthy, and others that are weak and sickly. Each church stands or falls before the Lord Jesus on its own merits, not because of others.

That churches are subject to many of the same experiences does not mean that churches are not independent. Why, the common human experience does not negate the uniqueness, singularity, or independence of each soul. We do not think of humans as a universal human. We use the term *humanity* to refer to the whole conglomerate of man abstractly or in an institutional sense, but there really isn't a *universal man*. Why then think of a church in those terms? As independent as I am, so are the Lord's churches.

That churches are subject to many of the same experiences does not mean that churches are not independent. Why, the common human experience does not negate the uniqueness, singularity, or independence of each soul. We do not think of humans as a universal human. We use the term *humanity* to refer to the whole conglomerate of man abstractly or in an institutional sense, but there really isn't a *universal man*. Why then think of a church in those terms? As independent as I am, so are the Lord's churches.

There is no such thing as a universal church. It's a hoax, a fiction, a farce. It's fake news! Every soul that shall ever come to Christ is *already* in Christ before the foundation of the world because God the Father chose us in Him then. (Jn.6.39; Eph.1.4; 2Ti.1.9) You see, the new birth is the personal experience of that and faith is the evidence. Well then, since the new birth and faith didn't add us to a church what should those do that have been born again and believed that Christ died for them? First, be baptized. Receive proper baptism at the hands of the only kind of church that Jesus Christ started during His earthly ministry. Be

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baptized at the hands of the only kind of church there is. Be baptized by a local, visible, real church. Then after that become a member of such a church and serve God with the other baptized, believing members there. The universal church hoax has done more to disrupt this divine order of things and has served to deceive so many from seeing the necessity of really, visibly serving Christ in a real church. A true church is like a fingerprint. No two are exactly alike. Yet they have the common *markings* which say that they are true churches.

The Church is Self-governing or Autonomous

In light of those things that we have said under the heading of *The Nature of the Church* we only make there few remarks to fill up the topic of a church's autonomy, or self-rule. A church has one lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is her only head, chief, and leader.

Joh 13:13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

Eph 5:23 ... Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

No other person or power in heaven or on earth, or below the earth has authority over the churches.

*Mt 28:18 And Jesus came and spake 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:*

These churches are called the churches of Christ and of God because they belong to Him.

*Ro 16:16 Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches **of Christ** salute you.*

*1Co 11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the **churches of God**.*

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All that a church believes, practices, and teaches must be rooted in the Word of the Lord or there is some measure of error.

Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell (Gr. ἐνοικέω, 3ps. pres. imper. of ἐνοικέω, ἐν by + οἰκέω to house), 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.

*Eph 5:24 Therefore as **the church is subject unto Christ**, so let the wives be to their own husbands **in every thing**.*

*2Co.2.9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, **whether ye be obedient in all things**.*

Lu 6:46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Pastors, or the other officers of the church, are not lord's over God's heritage (or lot). They are never called heads of the church. Pastors and deacons are for examples to the believers' of faith and doctrine in Christ.

1Pe 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage (lot), but being ensamples to the flock.

So, when I say autonomous, I mean that we members of this church stand before Christ and Christ alone, in the final analysis. That autonomy is corporately derived. Whenever a church decides anything we should decide together. No one man, no group outside of the church, but only this church, this whole church decides for itself, by the grace of God, what she shall do under the Headship of her Lord Jesus Christ. Based on the decisions that we make as one of the Lord's New Testament churches our Lord Jesus Christ judges us together, at this present time, because of our ties together under His Headship.

Re 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

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Re 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Re 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Re 2:25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

Re 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Re 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

The members of the Lord's church stands and falls together.

*1Pe 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. **Yea, all of you be subject one to another**, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

The Scriptures teach that the church is self-governing.