

# Quick Review

For the last two weeks, and again tonight, we're talking about the **independence, autonomy, and equality** of local churches.

# Quick Review of These Terms

- **Autonomous:** subject to the law of Christ, but judgments made by its own elders.
- **Independent:** no ties that bind it or its work to any other church.
- **Equal:** not inferior to or in submission to any other church in any of its functions.

# Quick Review

We introduced **three principles** upon which these three lessons are based.

# Three Principles

1. Churches are NOT autonomous, at least in one sense of the word.
2. Yet, there is a sense in which they ARE independent and autonomous.
3. This independence does NOT mean they should ignore other local churches.

# **(#3) Don't ignore one another**

- Acknowledgment/awareness of other local churches illustrated throughout the N.T.
  - “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17).
  - “The churches of Christ greet you” (Rom. 16:16).
  - One church may serve as an example to others:
    - 1) Macedonian churches—2 Cor. 8:1 ff; 2) church at Thessalonica—1 Thess. 1:6ff.
  - Problems in one sometimes broadcast to others (Rev. 2–3; 1 and 2 Corinthians).

# **(#3) Don't ignore one another**

- Local churches assisted one another
  - Many churches sent financial aid to the church in Jerusalem (Rom. 15; 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8–9).
  - In Acts 11, we see two different kinds of assistance:
    - Jerusalem sent Barnabas to the young church at Antioch (Acts 11:22–26).
    - Antioch then sent funds to several churches—churches who because of a famine, were unable to care for their own (Acts 11:27–30).

# What they did **NOT** do...

- They did **NOT** establish any organizational link between themselves (the various local churches).
- They did **NOT** create a sponsoring church to oversee the work of several (or many) churches.
- They did **NOT** organize some outside institution to which the churches contributed.

## (#3) Don't ignore one another

- Local churches may be **negatively** affected by others.
  - When unsettling teaching came to Antioch, the church sent men to Jerusalem (Acts 15).
- False teachers can and often do move from one church to another.
  - 2 Corinthians and Galatians (problems seem to have come from **outside** these churches).
- So we can't turn a "blind eye" to what is going on elsewhere.



# Conclusions

- We must **NEVER** link churches into any organization, affiliation, governing body, etc. (including the sponsoring church arrangement)—no matter how loose the organization may be.

# Conclusions

- Problems with linking local churches together.
  - Autonomy, independence, equality all compromised.
  - Elders oversee what they can't see.
  - The great danger of being influenced by the unsound practices of some in this “association.”
  - Statements of faith often come from such associations, statements which too often take the place of Scripture.
  - The all important question, “What am I doing?” can easily take a backseat to what the “**cooperative**” is doing.

# Conclusions

- The one church is composed of individuals, not local churches, and these local churches must function independently (at least in relation to each other).
- And so...

# Conclusions

- We must allow other churches to make their own judgments.
- However, no church has the “right” to violate the law of Christ. Autonomy is not a defense or shield against the charge of sin—from wherever and from whomever it comes.
- But, when churches do wrong, we must let Christ remove the lampstand or vomit them out (Rev. 2–3).

# Conclusions

- But, when churches do wrong, we must let Christ remove the lampstand or vomit them out (Rev. 2–3).
  - There is no association of churches from which we can “expel” them.
  - However, it may reach a point where one can no longer be part of a church, or offer any support for that church.
  - Christ is the One to whom they must answer in the judgment.

# Conclusions

- Warnings sent from one church or area to another do not violate anyone's autonomy.
  - If one church can write to another, urging them to receive a brother (Acts 18:27), could they not do the opposite?
- Preachers should respect congregational autonomy, but never fail to preach the truth (2 Timothy 4:5).

# Conclusions

- Let's be careful to distinguish between private/local concerns and ones others need to give attention to.
  - Acts 15:36–40.
  - Proverbs 26:17
- News can travel fast (especially bad news), so let love and mercy guide us when we receive news from elsewhere.
  - Romans 3:8.

# Conclusions

- Any departure from the truth should be considered serious, but changes to the work, worship, and organization of the local church carry with them the most far reaching consequences.