

## THE AUTONOMY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Autonomy means, "the right of self-government". When we speak of churches of Christ being autonomous we mean that each local congregation governs its own affairs under its own elders who serve under the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. Their work is not to make new laws, but to see that His laws are carried out. Each local church of Christ is independent of all outside control in all of her affairs. Any effort to interfere in the affairs of a local congregation by another church or individual is sinful. Points involved in church autonomy are:

1. It is the right of each local church to discipline its own members when they become unruly ( I Cor. 5: 1 - 5). This is the exclusive right of each congregation.
2. Each congregation has the right to manage its own affairs in matters of judgment and expediency (I Cor. 16:3).
3. Each church oversees its own work ( Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5: 1 - 4). No congregation has the right to turn its work over to another church.
4. Each congregation controls its own resources (Phil. 4: 15 - 16; II Cor. 11:8).
5. Providing for the needy among its own members is the right of every congregation ( Acts 6: 1 - 4; I Tim. 5:16).
6. Settling problems that arise within the local church, whether they be doctrinal or moral, is the work of each congregation (Acts 20: 28 - 30; Tit. 1: 9 - 14; I Cor. 5: 1 - 6). When problems arise within a local body it is the business and responsibility of that body to settle its problems without any outside interference.

Each local church is sufficient to do all the work God has assigned it to do. When a congregations right of self-government, as it pertains to discipline, to its own resources, to its work, to its relief program, to settling its problems or to any other matter, is taken over by another congregation, institution, or individual, its autonomy has been violated.

Some think autonomy is lost only when taken by force by some outside group. But the autonomy of a local church can be willingly surrendered to another church, institution, or individual in any point we have mentioned. The autonomy of the local church must be guarded in all points.

~ Donald Townsley

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