

THE SPONSORING CHURCH -- A DENOMINATIONAL CONCEPT

We have seen a major departure from the faith in the last thirty years because of a failure by the majority of brethren to understand the church of the New Testament. Misconceptions have brought about departure after departure from the truth. Many people who are now disillusioned with things that are happening in liberal churches will never be able to make proper correction of their mistakes until they understand what the New Testament teaches about the church and congregational cooperation.

The local congregation (Acts 14: 23) and the individual Christian (I Tim. 5:16; Acts 11:26) are the only two functioning units that Christ has authorized. The church universal is made up of the sum total of the saved. The unit which makes up the church universal is the individual Christian, not local churches. We read about a brotherhood of saints (I Pet. 2:17), not a brotherhood of churches.

The "sponsoring church" concept is one which activates the church universal in a central organization by having many churches pool their funds under one eldership. When this is done you have churches of Christ collectively acting together through a central agency, the "sponsoring church". The work done through the "sponsoring church" is not being done either by the individual Christian or as a local church because the "sponsoring church" is larger than a local congregation. The elders of a "sponsoring church" have assumed a work larger than the local congregation -- a work of brotherhood proportions. It is a work which places the funds of a number of congregations under the direction of one eldership, the "sponsoring church" eldership. These elders are no longer elders of a local church, but have become "brotherhood elders". They are now functioning in an office that the New Testament knows nothing about, because elders in the New Testament were local (I Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). The work of elders in the New Testament is assigned, not assumed! The work of "sponsoring church" elders is assumed ! There is no New Testament authority for assumed work, therefore in the creation of the "sponsoring church" you have a functioning unit unknown to the New Testament !

No congregation in the New Testament days did its work through another congregation. Antioch made up her own contribution and sent it directly to the elders of the churches which were in need in Judea (Acts 11: 27 - 30). Here we have a church with abundance sending to churches in need that they might do their own assigned work, not a "brotherhood work". The church at Corinth made up her own funds by the giving of her members and sent it directly to Jerusalem by the messenger of her own selection (I Cor. 16: 1- 3). The Jerusalem church was in need (Rom. 15: 25 - 27), and this contribution was to help her do her own work, not some "brotherhood" work.

The churches of Macedonia sent wages directly to Paul as he preached the gospel in Corinth (2 Cor. 11: 7 - 9). Each church supported him directly; they did not do their work through a "sponsoring church". Paul did not have a "sponsoring church" which gathered funds for him from all over the brotherhood. He taught that churches were to have direct fellowship (Phil. 1: 5) with the preacher whom they supported. The church at Philippi was one of the Macedonian churches which acted independently in sending support to Paul. They sent it to him by Epaphroditus, their messenger (Phil. 4: 14 - 18). No church in New Testament times ever sent money to another church to preach the gospel; they always sent directly to the preacher. Somebody will probably ask what difference it makes -- well, the difference is that one is found in the New

Testament and the other is not ! That makes a big difference if you are going to work by the authority of the New Testament (2 John 9) !

One can read nothing in the New Testament about a "sponsoring church" as the liberal brethren talk about it. This is language that is foreign to the New Testament, and the idea is denominational in concept.

Brethren, let us all speak as the oracles of God (I Pet. 4: 11); let us do the Lord's work in the way He has authorized in the New Testament, not in ways that might seem to be best to us. We are to please God, not ourselves !

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