

**A Biblical Basis for both  
the  
INDEPENDENCE  
and the  
INTERDEPENDENCE  
Of the Local Church**

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Based upon an inductive study of the New Testament,  
in partial fulfillment of a doctoral project.

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Rev. Carfrey is a member of the IFCA International, and  
presently serves as Vice President for Student Services and  
Pastoral Studies Coordinator at Appalachian Bible College.

[dcarfrey@abc.edu](mailto:dcarfrey@abc.edu)

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# THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Key Definition:** The Local Church is to be an *assembly of professing adherents to the Christian Faith, who have joined themselves to one another within a locality in an organized manner, for the purpose of collective Christian endeavors, so as to hold one another accountable for their beliefs and conduct, and so as to establish for themselves a separate identity from other local churches.*

- THE LOCAL CHURCH IS TO BE AN ASSEMBLY OF PROFESSING ADHERENTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.
  - This means they profess to be Christians.
    - ✓ Having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.
      - In the first church established at Jerusalem, the members of the congregation were called “believers.” Acts 4:32, 5:14.
      - The same can be said for churches Paul the apostle later established. Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 5:16.
    - ✓ Having called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, asking Him to be their personal Savior.
      - Paul the apostle greets not only the believers in the church at Corinth, but all of the saints in the area who have “called upon the name of Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” 1 Cor.1:2

- This is consistent with what Paul commanded by way of receiving the gospel in Romans 10:9-14.
- The author of the book of Hebrews exhorts those to whom he writes to hold on to the original confession of faith by which they were made “holy brethren,” and “partakers of the heavenly calling.” Cf. Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, and 10:23.

Note: The word translated “profession” in the King James English is really the word for “confession.” It is *homologeō*, the same Greek word used in 1 John 1:9. This confession of mouth, to receive Christ as personal Savior, is made personally by prayer to Christ in heaven as our great High Priest, and not to some church designated priest on earth.

Nor is this confession to be confused with that which one makes before men in the waters of baptism. It is that which John implies, when he wrote, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,” John 1:12.

✓ Having been baptized in water, in the name of the Father, in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and in the name of the Holy Spirit.

- Christ’s apostles were commanded to baptize all new disciples of Christ and His teachings. It is part of Christ’s last Great Commission. Matthew 28:19-20.

Note: There is no example in the New Testament Epistles of any water baptism taking place, apart from it being performed by an official leader in the local church. Thus water baptism is to be observed as an **ordinance of the local church**.

- About 3000 believers were added to the names of the original 120 in the first church at Jerusalem, only after they were first baptized. Acts 2:41.
- All those who responded by faith to the message of the gospel in Samaria were then baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:12.

Note: The Holy Spirit just fell on those Jews who had already been baptized with John's baptism of repentance as Christ's forerunner, and then believed in Jesus who followed him (cf. Acts 1:5 with 2:1-4). But for those Jews and Samaritans who did not believe prior to the Day of Pentecost, public acceptance of Christ was required before receiving the Holy Spirit. This is because Christ had been publicly rejected by those among whom He ministered (cf. Acts 2:38 with 8:14-17, 9:17-18, and 19:1-7).

While water baptism at that time was first required for some before receiving the Spirit, there should be no confusion as to the fact that it is a person's repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ which is required for salvation (cf. Acts 2:21, 20:21). Since Christ did not minister on earth among the Gentiles, they were not required to be baptized before receiving the Spirit (cf. Acts 10:42-48, 11:14-18, and 15:7-9).

Note: Many believers throughout church history have been confused about the role of water in salvation. While there are specific examples of those receiving the Spirit from Christ before entering the waters of baptism, as well as receiving the Spirit after being baptized with water, **there is no example** of any in the New Testament who received the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism.

The water of life that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman for salvation is not speaking of any water that one can find on earth (cf. John 4:13-14 with 7:37-39). And the water and blood of which John speaks, as a sign that Jesus was truly the Son of God, is the water and blood which came from His body on the tree (cf. John 20:34-37 with 1 John 5:5-6).

Water baptism is **not to be confused with** the Lord's one true spiritual baptism, nor is it to be added to the blood of Christ as being necessary for salvation. (cf. Matthew 3:11-12, Acts 1:5, Ephesians 4:3-6 and 1 Corinthians 1:7-18).

- Peter commanded the first Gentile converts to be baptized, not to be saved, but because they were already saved, as evidenced in their having received the indwelling presence of Christ's Holy Spirit. Acts 10:48.

✓ And having received the inner witness within, because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, that they are indeed the children of God.

- Paul the apostle states that every true believer has received the inner witness of the Holy Spirit that he or she is a child of God. Romans 8:15-16.

Note: This is a distinct privilege enjoyed by all believers in this present dispensation, the church age, which was not true in previous dispensations. Previously the Holy Spirit normally came upon prophets and kings of Israel, and that being for a temporary purpose, not a permanent indwelling for one's lifetime.

- Paul stated that the Holy Spirit's divine presence is God's seal upon us, to preserve us unto the day of salvation, as of the time when we first heard the Word of our salvation proclaimed, and responded in faith. Ephesians 1:13.
- He told the believers in the local church at Ephesus that they were being built together into a "holy temple," a "habitation of God through the Spirit." Ephesians 2:22.
- He told them as well that they were not to grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit by their sinful conduct, because they were sealed with His divine presence until the *day of redemption*, when the body is resurrected and set free from bondage to sin. Cf. Ephesians 4:30, 1:13-14 with Romans 8:23.
- Peter wrote his first epistle to those who had been sanctified, or set apart unto God as His holy people, by the Holy Spirit. 1 Peter 1:2.
- John informs those believers to whom he wrote, that they had received the anointing presence of the Holy Spirit when they were first enlightened as to who Jesus really is, and that they did not need false prophets to teach them otherwise. 1 John 2:20.

- Jude, in his epistle, identified those who left the assembly of those to whom he was writing, as being those who were sensual, and who did not have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Jude 19.
- Jesus gave warning to believers in the churches who were truly saved, and had ears to hear, to heed what the Holy Spirit had to say to all of the churches. Revelation 2:7.

Note: Since man cannot read the heart of another person, the best a church can require for joining its church membership, is that they come on a "Statement of Faith" in the Lord Jesus Christ, and come having been obedient to the Lord's command for all disciples to be baptized in water as a testimony to their faith.

Not every one who joins the membership of a local church, therefore, is necessarily really saved. Unless one has received the Lord's baptism, as evidenced in his having received the gift of the indwelling presence of Christ's Holy Spirit, he is not really recognized by Christ. As Paul says, he is "none of his," Romans 8:9.

- **This means they profess to adhere to the teachings of Christ.**
  - ✓ By becoming disciples of Christ's Way.
    - The believers in the first church, and churches thereafter, were called "disciples," to indicate their commitment to follow the ways of Christ. Acts 6:1, 6:7, 9:26, 9:36, 9:38, 20:7.
    - Being a disciple indicated to others that he or she was seeking to follow in Christ's "way," or Christ's commandments for the Christian way of life. Saul of Tarsus targeted, for persecution, those who were known for following "this way." Acts 9:2.
    - The disciples were first called "Christians" at the first Gentile church in Antioch of Syria, because they were so committed to following Christ's teachings. Acts 11:26.

- ✓ By heeding the doctrine of the apostles of Christ, as recorded in the New Testament.
  - Christ's apostles were given sign gifts of the Holy Spirit, establishing their credibility to speak authoritatively for Christ to the local churches after Christ's resurrection. Hebrews 2:3-4, 2 Corinthians 12:12.
  - The first church at Jerusalem was characterized by those who heeded the "apostle's doctrine." Acts 2:42.
  - Apostles appointed the first officers of the church, both elders and deacons. Acts 6:6, 14:23.
  - The apostles gathered with the church elders to settle the first church doctrinal controversy. Acts 15:6, 23.
  - The doctrine of Christ's apostles was the foundation on which every local church was to be built. 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 12:28, Ephesians 2:20.
  - The apostles wrote down what they taught in the New Testament, in order that the church might know how to fellowship with God. 1 John 1:1-4.

Note: This means then that every local church should see to it that its constitution for government is in harmony, as much as can be perceived, with what the apostles wrote down in the New Testament.

- **This means they have joined themselves to one another within a locality.**
  - ✓ Even though the word "church membership" is not found in the New Testament, the concept is.

Many years after the initial Day of Pentecost, when the first church was begun in Jerusalem, Luke was able to find a list of the names of those who were in the upper room at that

time. This is significant, in that the first church at Jerusalem maintained church records. Acts 1:15.

- Luke was also able to see the names of those added to the church roll that day, after they were baptized in the Christian Faith. They were about 3000. Acts 2:41.
- Since the first church had no church building in which to meet, they worshipped for a time in the large rooms of the temple. But for the partaking of the Lord's Supper or Communion, they separated from the animal sacrifices at the temple in order to partake in private homes of members throughout the city. This Luke calls the "breaking of bread from house to house." Acts 2:46.

Note: To do this, the apostles of the church at Jerusalem had to know who their own church members were, where they lived, and in which homes members of the congregation would partake.

- Joining the membership of the church was something to not be entered into lightly, as the inhabitants of Jerusalem became keenly aware upon the immediate death of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:11-14.
  - Christian disciples in the first church became protective of one another, when Saul of Tarsus led the first wave of persecution against the church at Jerusalem. Acts 9:26.
  - When the church could no longer meet publicly in Jerusalem, due to persecution, it was their already established network of private homes which enabled the church leaders to communicate information quickly to the church membership. This became the first *underground church*. Acts 12:12-17.
- ✓ There was to be an acceptance of one another into the fellowship of the local church, without discrimination against one another on the basis of one's age, gender, race, or past conduct (provided they met the other qualifications).

- All were called “saints” because of what Christ had caused them to become in the sight of God, regardless of their past. Acts 9:41, Romans 1:5, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6:1-2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, and Hebrews 13:24.
  - All were called “brethren” because of their equal identification with the family of God in Christ. Acts 12:17, 15:23, 20:32, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:5-6, 2 Corinthians 8:1, 23, Galatians 1:2, Colossians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:14, 5:12-13.
- **This means they assembled together on a weekly basis.**
  - ✓ They assembled at least once a week on Sundays. Acts 20:7.
  - ✓ It may have been in a person’s home at the first. Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 2.
  - ✓ It may have been in a rented or loaned facility. Acts 2:46, 20:8-9.
  - ✓ It may have been in their own church building. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 14:23.
  - ✓ It may have been in smaller group meetings in homes, as part of a larger church membership. Acts 2:46, 12:12.
  - ✓ But whatever the case might have been, one cannot read the New Testament epistles, and be able to separate the word “church” from the concept of “assembly.”  
1 Timothy 3:15, Heb.10:25, James 2:2.
  - ✓ As a matter of fact, the very Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, which means “called out.” It was a term used to describe those who were “called out” from where they were, for the purpose of assembling themselves in one place. It was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for “congregation.”

*These verses, as stated above, support the definition given of a local church, in that it is to be an assembly of professing adherents to the Christian Faith. But there is more to being a local church than just a group of believers assembling themselves together.*

➤ **THE LOCAL CHURCH IS TO BE AN ASSEMBLY OF PROFESSING ADHERENTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AN ORGANIZED MANNER.**

Some try to loosely define a church by quoting Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20. But Jesus was not referring to a church in this verse. He was referring to those who testify before the church about a matter which should have been resolved privately, and was not because of a lack of cooperation by the offending party (cf. Matthew 18:17-19).

Jesus' requirement of two or three giving testimony in His name, with Him being in their midst (though unseen) to witness what was being testified, was consistent with what God required under the Mosaic Law. For God required that there be two or three witness for a conviction to take place.

For a church to be a church in the eyes of God, it must mean more than just two or three gathered together in His name. They must be an organized assembly.

*It means that...*

- **They have their own elders or bishops.**
  - ✓ The churches of Judea had elders who assembled with the apostles to discuss the first major doctrinal controversy. Acts 15:6.

Note: There were no special instructions given by the apostles for the establishment of elders, like those which were given for the appointment of the first deacons (Acts 6), because Jews already understood the purpose and function of elders. They knew this from the system of government they were already accustomed to in the synagogues. Thus elders suddenly appear in the book of Acts, without any explanation by Luke as to how and when the churches first appointed them to leadership.

- ✓ Paul ordained elders in each church he started on his first missionary journey. Acts 14:23.

Note: Paul, as an apostle, saw to it that men were spiritual qualified to lead the church. It was up to the congregation to accept these men as their elders, and then follow their leadership after he was gone. In the same way, Paul instructed Timothy to oversee the recommendation and appointment of elders at Ephesus, (Timothy being a Missionary Pastor). Cf. 2 Timothy 2:2, 1 Timothy 5:22.

- ✓ Paul charged the elders with the responsibility of oversight of the assembly. Acts 20:17, 28.
- ✓ Paul reported to the twelve apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem upon his delivery of the offering of Gentile churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Acts 21:18.

Note: It is interesting to note that while the apostles and elders gathered together to come to a consensus, they still recognized the need for one of them to be in charge of the meeting. In this case, it was James. Thus leadership is given to the assembly, for the sake of orderliness, without there being a sense of dictatorship.

- ✓ Paul addressed his letter to the saints at Philippi, along with the bishops and deacons.

Note: The term “bishops” would be more familiar to Gentiles, and the term “elders” more familiar to Jews. Thus Paul uses these terms interchangeably to refer to the same office. Acts 20:28 (elders are called bishops or overseers, cf. 20:17). Also the same requirements are stated by Paul for bishops (1 Timothy 3:1-7) as those stated by Paul for elders (Titus 1:5-9).

It is important to distinguish between an elder, and an elder who is also a pastor-teacher. The pastor is called of God and given the spiritual gift of preaching, along with the apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Elders, who are elders only, are not required to preach, but are required to be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). The *office of bishop or elder* of a local church is available to any man, according to Paul, who meets the qualifications he sets forth to Timothy and Titus for the office. *But a pastor-teacher*, according to Paul, is a spiritual gift selectively given by Christ to some, and is not available to all (Ephesians 4:11-12).

It is a mistake to recognize the need for a pastor, and not the need for a plurality of qualified elders to assist in the leadership of a local church. In the first Baptist churches started in Europe, for example, having a plurality of elders was practiced. But in many Baptist churches of America today, deacons are really performing the role of elders.

It is also a mistake to have a plurality of elders, without seeing the need also for a God-called pastor and teacher. This has been the mistake, for example, of some Brethren churches.

- ✓ James the apostle tells those sick in the church to call for the elders (plural) of the church (singular) to come for the laying on of hands, the anointing with oil, and the praying for divine healing. James 5:14-15.
- ✓ Peter was not only Christ's apostle to the local churches in general, but he was also considered to be an elder of a local church. 1 Peter 5:1.

Note: This verse provides a two-fold comparison, by way of analogy, to the manner in which a pastor and elders should work together. First of all, it seems only reasonable that Peter, being an apostle, would be asked to also serve as an elder of a particular local church of which he was considered to be a member. In the same way, it would only make sense for a God-called preacher, and pastor-teacher of a local church, to sit with the other elders on the governing board of a church.

Secondly, just as Peter spoke of himself as being an elder along with those to whom he was writing, without in any way elevating himself as an apostle above the others, in the same manner a pastor should demonstrate the same team spirit in working with fellow elders.

- **They have their own deacons and perhaps deaconesses.**

- ✓ Deacons were first appointed to simply supervise the distribution of goods to the poor believing widows in the assembly. They were not apostles, neither were they elders. Acts 6:1-6.

Note: There were only six deacons appointed for a congregation of over 8000 church members in the city of Jerusalem. They were accountable to the apostles and to the congregation for this

compassionate responsibility only. They were not called upon to settle doctrinal questions which arose at a later time in the church, Acts 15:6. Nor were they required to be able to teach God's Word in order to be able to fulfill the office of a deacon, 1 Timothy 3:8-13 (although one of the first deacons, Philip, became an evangelist later, Acts 8:5 and 21:8).

- ✓ There could also have been deaconesses. The word translated "servant" in Romans 16:1, referring to Phoebe, is the same word as that translated "deacon" in 1 Timothy 3:8.

Note: The term "deacon," by itself, could refer to either a man or a woman, because the noun itself in the Greek is neither male nor female in gender. Only the Biblical context informs us which the case might be. Thus there is debate as to whether or not the phrase "their wives" in 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to the wives of the men deacons, or refers to the women deacons. The Greek literally reads, "the women."

There is credible evidence in the first centuries of the church for the office of women deacons. If so, they probably met not only the requirements set forth in 1 Timothy 3:11, but also those set forth in 1 Timothy 5:9-10. In their marriages, they had to be the wife of one husband, even as elders and deacons had to be the husbands of one wife. They also primarily practiced humanitarian roles, as did the men deacons, and were under the authority of the church elders who were men only. The concept of a deaconess with authority over male leadership in the church is unscriptural.

- **They have their own church budgets.**

- ✓ Deacons were not to be guilty of embezzling church funds, 1 Timothy 3:8. The same command was given to church elders, 1 Peter 5:2.
- ✓ Widows in their sixties and above, who were truly without any assistance from family, and who met the qualifications, were to be honored by placing them on the church rolls for regular financial support, in return for their vows to serve the church. Elders, who had served the church well, were to be treated with double honor in their later years, especially those elders who had served the church primarily in the function of teaching God's Word, 1 Timothy 5:1-17.

Note: This had to do with honoring those, who – in their later years – had served the church well, and needed financial assistance. They did not have the kind of retirement portfolios Americans are familiar with.

*These verses support the definition that a local church is not to be a disorganized assembly of Christians, but an organized assembly with their own government and officers, whether those in office be called pastor, elders, deacons, or deaconesses.*

*The point is this: they are organized with their own self-government, without outside interference by other local churches. Hence the term “autonomous,” which is a word describing the fact that a church congregation is “self-governing.”*

*But local churches are not simply to be organized assemblies for any purposes invented by man. Rather...*

- THE LOCAL CHURCH IS TO BE AN ASSEMBLY OF PROFESSING ADHERENTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AN ORGANIZED MANNER,  
**FOR THE PURPOSE OF**  
**COLLECTIVE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVORS.**

*By the word “collective” we mean that believers are to function together in ministry for the Lord, not in total isolation from one another. What are some of these collective Christian endeavors?*

- **To hear the preaching and teaching of God’s Word, especially the words of Christ and His apostles for the church today.**
  - ✓ The church began with an emphasis upon the teaching of the doctrines of Christ, as taught by His apostles. Acts 2:42.
  - ✓ Paul the apostle preached a long sermon, when the church at Troas gathered on a Sunday evening to observe the Lord’s Supper. Acts 20:7.

- ✓ Pastor-teachers were called of God to instruct the church in God's Word, whereby all might grow up spiritually in Christ to become mature believers, and able to minister for Christ in the area of their own spiritual gifts. Ephesians 4:11-16.
- ✓ Timothy was commanded by Paul the apostle to "preach the word," 2 Timothy 4:2.
- **To praise and worship God together and mutually exhort one another in the assembly.**
  - ✓ Luke records that the first church assembly continued to meet daily with one accord in the temple at Jerusalem, praising God. Acts 2:46-47.
  - ✓ The practice of corporate praise is said to be the offering up of spiritual sacrifices to God, as a function of our priesthood on earth today. Cf. Hebrews 13:15 with 1 Peter 2:5.
  - ✓ Paul commands the believers to be filled with the Spirit, so that they can speak boldly in singing and testifying in the assembly, Ephesians 5:18-20. This includes admonishing one another with Scripture as well, Colossians 3:16.
  - ✓ The writer of Hebrews urges the believers to give consideration as to how to "provoke (one another) unto to love and good works" in the assembly. Hebrews 10:24-25.
- **To teach and exhort one another.**
  - ✓ Every believer is to grow up in the Christian Faith to the point where he or she can teach another the basics. Hebrews 5:12.

Note: This does not require the spiritual gift of teaching, for the writer of Hebrews is not referring to public teaching, but a private, one-on-one, discipleship type of teaching. Every believer is to be disciplined himself, and in turn taught to disciple others, Matthew 28:19-20.

- ✓ Every believer is not only to be careful in his or her own conduct, but to watch out for one another, exhorting one another daily regarding the danger of backsliding. Hebrews 3:12-13.
- **To pray together.**
  - ✓ The first church began with corporate prayer, being assembled together in one place for ten days. Acts 2:1.
  - ✓ They continued to do so afterwards. Acts 2:42.
  - ✓ When the apostles came under persecution, they gathered the church together to pray. Acts 4:23-31, 12:12.
- **To partake of the Lord's Supper together.**

Note: There is no example in the New Testament Epistles of Communion being observed apart from the corporate assembly of believers in the local church. For this reason, it is to be considered and **ordinance of the local church.**

- ✓ The first church did so. Acts 2:42, 46.
- ✓ The church at Troas had a custom of doing so. Acts 20:7.
- ✓ Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for combining the Lord's Supper with common suppers. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22.
- ✓ Failure to discipline serious sin among the church membership could bring God's judgment upon the whole, should they partake of the Lord's Supper together. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.
- ✓ Jude warned the believers to whom he wrote against those who were perverting the Lord's Supper in their "Love Feasts." Jude 4.

- **To eat together in fellowship.**
  - ✓ The first church did so. Acts 2:42.
  - ✓ The church occasion, at which the apostle Paul rebuked Peter, was a church fellowship dinner. Galatians 2:11-12.
- **To make a contribution to one another in the area of one's spiritual gift.**
  - ✓ Paul urges that each believer contribute to the whole assembly in the area of one's spiritual gifts. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.
  - ✓ Peter does the same. 1 Peter 3:10-11.
- **To bear one another's burdens.**
  - ✓ That's what the first church did, when it came to a crisis involving all of the new converts who had come from various countries for the religious feasts at Jerusalem. Desiring to stay with the new church, many of these new converts had no homes or jobs in the local area. So offerings were laid at the apostles' feet to help those in crisis. Acts 4:33-37. Deacons were also appointed to disburse goods on a daily basis to the widows in need. Acts 6:1-6.
  - ✓ Paul commanded the churches of Galatia to have a readiness to bear one another's burden, if a believer is in real need. Galatians 6:2.
    - Note: Paul goes on to say that each should learn to bear his own burden, so that he can help others bear theirs and not be a burden himself. Galatians 6:4-5. He informed the believers in the church at Thessalonica, that if any believer refused to work, neither should he eat. 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
  - ✓ Paul and Barnabas delivered an offering to needy Christians in Jerusalem from the first Gentile church in Antioch of Syria. Acts 11:26-30.

- ✓ Paul set the same example in his own church planting ministry among the Gentiles. 1 Corinthians 16:1.
  - ✓ Paul charged the church with the responsibility to care for older widows who were truly left alone. 1 Timothy 5:16.
  - ✓ James the apostle said that the care of widows, orphans, and brethren who were in desperate need, was a demonstration of true Christianity. James 1:26-27, 2:14-16.
  - ✓ The apostle John said that the love of God does not dwell in a person who demonstrates a non-compassionate spirit towards fellow believers in desperate need. 1 John 3:17-18.
- **To advance the cause of the gospel, at home and elsewhere around the world.**
    - ✓ That's what the first Gentile church did, when they sent forth Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey. That's why they returned to the church afterwards to give a report of their ministry. Acts 13:1-4, 14:27.
    - ✓ There are other examples of churches assisting Paul financially to support his missionary endeavors. 2 Corinthians 11:9, Philippians 4:15, 19.
    - ✓ Paul rejoiced when the gospel of Christ spread to the regions beyond through the testimony of a local church. 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

*These then, in a broad sense, are the activities of a local church involving collective action of the corporate body in Christian endeavors.*

***The local church is not a social club. It is a divine institution with divinely appointed responsibilities.***

*There is yet another purpose for the local church...*

- THE LOCAL CHURCH IS TO BE AN ASSEMBLY OF PROFESSING ADHERENTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AN ORGANIZED MANNER, FOR THE PURPOSE OF COLLECTIVE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVORS,

**SO AS TO HOLD ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE  
FOR THEIR BELIEFS AND CONDUCT.**

- **Church members are to be held accountable by the congregation for their beliefs.**
  - ✓ Paul the apostle warned the elders of the church at Ephesus to watch out for false doctrine in their own midst. Acts 20:28-31.
  - ✓ Paul expected the members of the church to remain faithful to Christ. Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:2.
  - ✓ Paul later sent Timothy back to the church at Ephesus, to straighten out some false doctrine which had come into the church. 1 Timothy 1:3.
  - ✓ The little epistle of 2 John was written solely for the purpose of warning regarding the tolerance of false doctrine, especially when it comes to who Jesus Christ is. 2 John 7-11.
  - ✓ Hence the term, **fundamental**. A local church is to hold to fundamental beliefs, which are foundational to the Christian Faith. Each local church should have a Doctrinal Statement of what they hold dear by way of a commonly shared beliefs among their membership.
- **Church member are also to be held accountable by the congregation for their conduct.**
  - ✓ The first church came to a quick realization, through the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, that the Lord is the head of the church, and that its members are accountable to Him for their conduct. Acts 5:11.

- ✓ The apostles were at first protective of the congregation from seeing Paul the apostle, until they were sure that he had truly been converted. Acts 9:26.
- ✓ Paul commanded the congregation of the church at Corinth to dismiss from their fellowship a member who was involved in serious moral sin. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.
- ✓ Paul also rebuked the church at Corinth for not holding its membership accountable for their conduct in financial matters, and for seeking to resolve such issues instead in the Roman court of law. 1 Corinthians 6:1-5.
- ✓ Paul told the believers in the church at Ephesus to be submissive to one another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:21.
- ✓ He warned the church at Philippi to make sure their conduct was becoming to the gospel of Christ and of a good testimony in the community. Philippians 1:27.
- ✓ Paul exhorted the church at Thessalonica regarding their attitude and behavior towards their church leaders, as well as to one another in general. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.
- ✓ The writer of the book of Hebrews gave a similar exhortation. Hebrews 13:17, 24.
- ✓ The church elders were to be held even more accountable for their conduct. 1 Timothy 5:19-20.
- ✓ The little epistle of 3 John was written with the accountability of church leaders in mind. 3 John 9-10.
- ✓ Church members were not to forsake the assembling of themselves together for the sake of avoiding accountability. Hebrews 10:25.

*So there can be no question regarding the fact that believers were to be members of a local church, so as to become accountable to one another for their beliefs and conduct, in order that the name of Christ be glorified rather than dishonored among those who had not yet responded favorably to the gospel of Christ.*

*But it is impossible for all believers to be held accountable to, and for, all believers. That is, the universal church. Hence the term "local church" is important. For...*

- **THE LOCAL CHURCH IS TO BE AN ASSEMBLY OF PROFESSING ADHERENTS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN AN ORGANIZED MANNER, FOR THE PURPOSE OF COLLECTIVE CHRISTIAN ENDEAVORS, SO AS TO HOLD ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR BELIEFS AND CONDUCT, AND SO AS TO ESTABLISH FOR THEMSELVES A SEPARATE IDENTITY FROM OTHER LOCAL CHURCHES.**

- When Paul established the first churches in the province of Galatia, on his first missionary journey, he placed them under the authority of Christ, the head of the church, and their own installed elders. He did not place them under the authority of the first Jewish church at Jerusalem where the twelve apostles were, nor the first Gentile church at Antioch of Syria. Acts 14:23.
- When Jesus gave His final message to seven local churches, He mentioned the strengths and weakness of each, and told them He would hold each member accountable for what took place in their particular church. Revelation 2-3.

Note: This emphasizes two important facts. First, the importance of joining a local church, because Christ's message was to the local churches, and not to individual believers. Secondly, the importance of joining the right kind of local church, because we will not only give an account to the Lord for ourselves, but we will also give an account for that which occurred in our local church. cf. Revelation 2:5.

- Each church had its separate identity from one another due to geographical location.
  - ✓ The church at Jerusalem. Acts 5:11, 8:1.
  - ✓ The church at Antioch of Syria. Acts 13:1, 14:27.
  - ✓ The churches in the cities of Galatia (eastern Turkey)
    - 1 Corinthians 16:1.
      - Antioch of Pisidia. Acts 14:14, 20-23.
      - Lystra. Acts 14:6, 20-23
      - Derbe. Acts 14:6, 20-23
      - Iconium. Acts 14:1, 20-23.
  - ✓ The churches of Asia Minor (western Turkey)
    - Ephesus. Acts 20:17, Revelation 2:1.
    - Smyrna. Revelation 2:8.
    - Pergamos. Revelation 2:12.
    - Thyratira. Revelation 2:18.
    - Sardis. Revelation 3:1.
    - Philadelphia. Revelation 3:7.
    - Laodicea. Revelation 3:14, Colossians 4:16.
    - Colosse. Colossians 1:2.
  - ✓ The churches of Macedonia (Greece)
    - Philippi. Philippians 1:1, 4:15.
    - Thessalonica. 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1.
  - ✓ The churches of Achaia.
    - Cenchrea. Romans 16:1.
    - Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1.

*Each church had its own identity apart from other local churches. Hence the term “**independent.**” It was God’s design that every local assembly be an **independent, fundamental, and autonomous local church.***

There is no support in the New Testament for the Roman Catholic takeover of churches in the fourth century, and there is no support for

the denominationalism which has resulted from the Protestant Reformation.

This is not to say that there are not fine Christians in denominational churches. Nor is it to say that nothing good has been done by denominations. It is only to say that the New Testament only authorizes the establishment of **independent, fundamental, and autonomous** local churches.

# INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

➤ **WE HAVE ESTABLISHED THE FACT THAT EACH LOCAL CHURCH WAS TO BE INDEPENDENT AND AUTONOMOUS OF OTHER LOCAL CHURCHES, AS FAR AS THEIR GOVERNING BODY IS CONCERNED. THERE ARE GOOD REASONS FOR THIS...**

- **To prevent the spread of false doctrine.**

- ✓ Each church was to be on the alert within its own membership to guard against false doctrine, Acts 20:28-31.

Note: Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for the fact that they had “tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them to be liars,” Revelation 2:2. He commends them for the fact that their refusal to tolerate such in their church was an evidence of the fact that they loved His name, Revelation 2:3. He then rebukes them for having left their “first love,” and warns them to go back to doing what they used to when they did love His name enough to stand against false doctrine, Revelation. 2:5

Each local church should have its own doctrinal statement as to what it believes are foundational truths related to the common Christian Faith. Each church should strive to come to the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” which includes that which they share by common beliefs and practices, Ephesians 4:1-14.

*Not every local church would fulfill the Scriptural mandate to guard against the intrusion of non-Christian beliefs and practices. So the independence of each local church served a vital purpose. For...*

- ✓ Should false doctrine permeate the congregation of a particular local church, the fact that churches are to be independent and autonomous helps to prevent the false

doctrine and practices of one congregation from defiling the doctrine and practices of other congregations.

Independence therefore helps to deter the rapid spread of false doctrine and non-Scriptural practices from church to church.

Note: This is the same principle by which God prevented the rapid spread of violence and false religion throughout the world after Noah's Flood. For by God's dividing the nations at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), and superintending the rise and fall of separate and independent nations (Acts 17:26-27), people have been able to seek and find the knowledge of God.

The Bible does not endorse the concept of a on-world government, nor does it endorse the concept of a one-world church. It rather endorses the concept of individual, independent churches, in the same way it endorses independent and separate nations.

- ✓ When Christianity was established as the only State-recognized religion by the Roman Emperor in the fourth century, the church at Rome departed from the concept of the need for independent churches, and exerted its newly established power to form one church, called the Roman Catholic Church. It became more and more acceptable to comply with whatever the church at Rome desired.

*And what was the result of this departure from Biblical ecclesiology?*

- ✓ Corruption of the church became so prevalent, that it lead to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The key issue at stake was whether or not salvation was by faith alone in Jesus Christ, or was it by one's observing the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church in addition to one's faith.

Note: This departure from that which the New Testament had mandated by way of church government, and the ensuing corruption in doctrine and practice which followed, has been a stumbling block to many young people who study Western Civilization in our higher institutions of learning. They blame Christianity in general for the evils which history records took place for other a thousand years.

- ✓ Unfortunately, when Christian denominations were formed after the Protestant Reformation, they also failed to establish the New Testament mandate for independent and autonomous local churches. They sought to control one another through a centralized authority, involving a hierarchy of ecclesiastical position, and/or the sharing and control over church properties and funds.

*And what was the result of this departure from Biblical ecclesiology?*

- ✓ Protestant denominations, which started off with the desire to follow the Bible rather than church traditions contrary to the Bible, became themselves corrupt, and that corruption spread through the denominationally controlled churches to the point that devoted Christians were faced with the choice of compromise, or of getting out. This has been the history of every major Protestant Denomination.

Even denominations which claim their churches to be autonomous, still have an impact upon the churches in affiliation with them by what they do with their collective resources, their literature, their cooperative programs, and their institutions of higher learning.

- ✓ So church history, since the first century, has demonstrated in a tragic way the necessity for the independence of the local church. And it has been the departure from that mandate of Scripture which has led to the fracture today in Christian belief and practice, to the point where people are confused as to what Christianity is, and what it is not!

*There is another good reason for the independence of each local church. And that is..*

- **To hold each Christian accountable to a local assembly, for his beliefs and practices.**
  - ✓ It is impossible for any one church to monitor the beliefs and practices of every Christian through out the world of

the universal church. It is impossible for one local church to meet the needs of every believer through out the world of the universal church. This is why the independent local church is so important in the life of every Christian.

- ✓ Not only will the Christian be held accountable before the Lord to be associated with a local church, but he will also be held accountable before the Lord as to what goes on in the church of which he or she is a member. Indeed, identification with a local church is to be regarded as a serious matter by every true disciple of Christ.

*Yet, while it is true that every local church is to be independent as far as its autonomy is concerned, that does not mean that independent churches cannot cooperate with one another in common causes.*

- **IT IS BIBLICALLY PROPER FOR LOCAL CHURCHES, OF LIKE FAITH, TO PRACTICE COOPERATIVE INTERDEPENDENCE, WITHOUT IN ANY WAY COMPROMISING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, OR SACRIFICING THEIR INDEPENDENCE.**

It is proper because **such was the practice of the churches in the New Testament.**

- ◆ **Paul set the example in encouraging cooperative interdependence between local churches.**
  - ❖ By revisiting churches he had started to encourage them in the Faith.
    - On his first missionary journey. Acts 14:22.
    - On his second missionary journey. Acts 15:35-41.
    - On his third missionary journey. Acts 18:22-23.
  - ❖ By demonstrating care for churches he had not started.
    - He was recruited by Barnabas to assist the new church at Antioch of Syria. Acts 11:26.
    - He wrote an epistle to the church at Rome, expressing his interest in them, even though he had not yet been there. Romans 1:8-9.

- He wrote the Corinthians, expressing his care for all of the churches. 2 Corinthians 11:28.
  - ❖ By writing epistles to local churches.
    - The church at Rome. Romans 1:17.
    - The church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1:1-2.
    - The churches of Galatia. Galatians 1:1-2.
    - The church at Ephesus. Ephesians 1:1.
    - The church at Philippi. Philippians 1:1.
    - The church at Colosse. Colossians 1:1-2.
    - The church at Thessalonica.
      - 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4.
    - Philemon, and the church meeting in his house.
      - Philemon 1-2.
  - ❖ By extending greetings to all believers within a region in the various local churches.
    - 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1-2.
  - ❖ By exchanging greetings between believers and churches.
    - Romans 16:3-23, 1 Corinthians 16:19-21, 2 Corinthians 13:13, Ephesians 6:23-24, Philippians 4:21-23, 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18, 2 Timothy 4:19-21.
- Note: Peter and John did the same in their epistles.  
1 Peter 5:13, 2 John 13, 3 John 14.
- ❖ By giving instructions to churches pertaining to the assistance of other churches.
    - He instructed the church at Rome to assist Phebe in her visit on church business from Corinth.
      - Romans 16:1-2.
    - He instructed the churches of Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia to collect offerings for the poor saints at Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, 2 Corinthians 8-9, and Romans 14:25-28.
- ◆ **Local churches showed concern for the welfare of other churches.**

- ❖ When the church of Jews at Jerusalem heard about the new church of Gentiles at Antioch of Syria, they sent Barnabas to be of encouragement to them. Acts 11:22-24.
- ❖ When the church at Antioch of Syria heard that a famine would come, they sent an offering by the hands of Paul and others to relieve the saints in the church at Jerusalem. Acts 11:28-30.
- ❖ When the Jewish apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to decide what was necessary for Gentiles to do for salvation, they sent Paul and others to inform the new churches which had been planted in Antioch of Syria, all of Syria, and Cilicia. Acts 15:22-23.
- ❖ Paul commended the church at Thessalonica for their love for all the brethren in Macedonia, not just those in Thessalonica, and he instructed them to read his epistle to all the holy brethren in their region.  
1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, 5:27.
- ❖ Churches from Macedonia assisted Paul financially in his efforts to start a church at Corinth. 2 Corinthians 11:8-9.
- ❖ The church at Corinth assisted Paul in prayer and financial support while he ministered, planting churches in Asia.  
2 Corinthians 1:11.
- ❖ The churches of Asia sent greetings to the church at Corinth through the hand of Paul in his epistle.  
1 Corinthians 16:19-20.
- ❖ The church of Rome:
  - Paul informed the church at Rome of his intent to first deliver the offering, which had been raised by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the poor saints in Jerusalem, before journeying to visit them. He also requested that they pray for his journey.  
Romans 15:26-31.

- Paul sent greetings from the “churches in Christ” to the church at Rome. Romans 16:16.
- The whole church at Corinth sent greetings to the church of Rome through the hand of Paul. Romans 16:23.
  
- ❖ The church at Jerusalem:  
James and all the elders assembled themselves in order to greet Paul when he arrived in Jerusalem. Acts 21:17-19.
  
- ❖ The church of Colosse:
  - Paul wanted the church at Colosse to know not only of his burden for them, but for the church at Laodicea as well. Colossians 2:1.
  - Paul also wanted the church at Colosse to know that Epaphras not only care for them, but also for the churches at Laodicea and Hierpolis. Colossians 4:12-13.
  - Paul requested that the church at Colosse not only send greetings on his behalf to the brethren in Laodicea, and to the new church in the house of Nympha, but that they exchange between them the epistles he wrote to the churches at Colosse and at Laodicea. Colossians 4:15-16.
  
- ◆ **Believers assisted other believers, whether they were members of their particular local church, or not.**
  - Disciples in Damascus of Syria helped Salu of Tarsus escape those seeking to kill him. Acts 9:25.
  - Simon, a tanner by occupation, opened his home for Peter to lodge in while ministering along the Mediterranean coast. Acts 10:6.
  - Lydia opened her home to Paul and his team while starting a church in Philippi. Acts 16:15.

- Jason opened his home to Paul and Silas in Thessalonica. Acts 17:5.
  - Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to Paul in Corinth. Acts 18:1-3.
  - Gaius opened his home to Paul in Corinth on his third missionary journey, before he departed for Jerusalem. Romans 16:23.
  - Disciples at Tyre opened their homes to Paul, and those with him, on his way to Jerusalem. Acts 21:4-5.
  - The brethren at Ptolema did the same. Acts 21:7.
  - Luke records that Paul stayed with Philip at Caesarea for many days, before continuing his journey to Jerusalem. Acts 21:8-10.
  - The brethren at Caesarea showed concern about Paul's visit to Jerusalem. Acts 21:10-14.
  - The writer of the book of Hebrews commends the believers for their past ministry to the saints who had suffered for the cause of Christ. Hebrews 6:10.
  - Peter urges the believers to whom he writes in the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, to have fervent love towards one another, and to be hospitable to one another. 1 Peter 4:8-9.
  - John commends Gaius for his hospitality to missionaries who came through his way, while at the same time denouncing the actions of Diotrephes who opposed anyone in the church who did so. 3 John 5-10.
- ◆ **Believers were accustomed to the concept of teamwork among recognized co-laborers with Paul.**

- ❖ At Galatia:
  - Barnabas. Acts 13:14 – 14:28.
  - Unnamed brethren. Galatians 1:2.
  - Crescens. 2 Timothy 4:10.
  
- ❖ At Philippi:
  - Silas and Timothy. Acts 15:40 – 16:3.
  - Luke. Acts 16:10 (“we”).
  - Timothy. Philippians 1:1, 2:19-24.
  - Epaphroditus. Philippians 2:25-30, 4:18.
  - Clement. Philippians 4:3.
  - Women co-laborers. Philippians 4:3.
  
- ❖ At Thessalonica:
  - Silas and Timothy. Acts 17:4,14;  
1 Thessalonians 1:1, 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:1.
  
- ❖ At Corinth:
  - Silas and Timothy. Acts 18:5.
  - Timothy. 1 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 1:1.
  - Titus. 2 Corinthians 7:13, 8:23.
  - Sosthenes. 1 Corinthians 1:1.
  - Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus.  
1 Corinthians 16:17-18.
  - Aquila and Priscilla.  
1 Corinthians 16:19 (cf. Acts 18:1-2).
  - Erastus. 2 Timothy 4:20.
  
- ❖ At Ephesus:
  - Aquila and Priscilla. Acts 18:18-19.
  - Timothy and Erastus. Acts 19:21-22.
  - Gaius and Aristarchus. Acts 19:29.
  - Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius and Timothy of Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. Acts 20:4.
  - Tychicus. Ephesians 6:21-22, 2 Timothy 4:12.
  - Timothy. 1 Timothy 1:3.
  - John Mark. 2 Timothy 4:11.
  - Priscilla and Aquila. 2 Timothy 4:19.
  - Onesiphorus. 2 Timothy 4:19.

- ❖ At Colosse:
  - Epaphras. Colossians 1:7-8.
  - Tychicus and Onesimus. Colossians 4:8-9.
  - Aristarchus, John Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas. Colossians 4:10-16.
  - Archippus. Colossians 4:17.
  
- ❖ At Crete:
  - Barnabas. Acts 13:1-4.
  - Titus. Titus 1:5.
  - Artemas and Tychicus. Titus 3:12.
  - Zenas the lawyer, and Apollos. Titus 3:13.
  
- ❖ At Dalmatia: Titus. 2 Timothy 4:10.
  
- ❖ At Troas: Carpus. 2 Timothy 4:13.
  
- ❖ At Miletus. Trophimus. 2 Timothy 4:20.
  
- ◆ **Churches were affected for good or for bad, by what happened to other believers and churches.**
  - ❖ Paul considered his persecution of believers in Jerusalem to be an attack upon the church of God in general. 1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13.
  
  - ❖ The churches of Judea glorified God for Paul's conversion, though they had not seen him in person. Galatians 1:22-24.
  
  - ❖ The churches in all of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, had rest from persecution after the leaders of the church in Jerusalem were able to smuggle Paul out of the country. Acts 9:28-31.
  
  - ❖ Paul told the church at Thessalonica that they had become examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. He also told them that he used their testimony to encourage other churches in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:4.

- ❖ Paul wrote the church at Corinth about his difficulties in planting churches in Asia, and thanked them for their support in prayer and in giving. He stated that the difficulties and comfort experienced were for their benefit as well. And he told them that they would share in rejoicing with him, in the day of the Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 1:1-14.
- ❖ In the raising of funds collected for the poor saints at Jerusalem, the concept of interdependence is seen.
  - Paul used the generosity of the Macedonians as an example to exhort the Corinthians to do the same. 2 Corinthians 8:1-6.
  - He told the Corinthians that their participation would be evidence of their love before the brethren in other participating churches. 2 Corinthians 8:24.
  - He said that his boasting of the Corinthians previously had spurred participation by those in Macedonia. 2 Corinthians 9:1-2.
  - As a result, Paul told the Corinthians that he, as we as they, would be embarrassed when he arrived, if they had not collected this offering as they had said they would. 2 Corinthians 9:3-4.
  - He motivated them to give on the basis that their offering would be of benefit both practically and spiritually upon the saints at the church in Jerusalem. 2 Corinthians 9:12-14.
- ❖ Paul told the church at Rome that all of the churches of the Gentiles owed a debt of gratitude to Priscilla and Aquila for their sacrifice to assist Paul in planting churches. Romans 16:4.
- ❖ Paul rejoiced that some were emboldened to preach Christ after he was imprisoned, even though they might speak ill of him, because the gospel message was advanced. Philippians 1:12-18.

- ❖ Paul desired to depart from this life and be with Christ, but he recognized that his ministry on earth was needful for the sake of the church. Philippians 1:24-26.

**It is proper because the concepts of the universal gospel, and our common faith, supports the need for interdependence between local churches, without compromising or sacrificing independence.**

- ◆ **The gospel of Christ, by which we share a common faith, is universal.**

*This means that...*

- ❖ Churches are to have a world view which is consistent with the world view that Jesus commanded of His disciples in the Great Commission.
  - Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and that he would be with them in doing this until the end of the world or age. Matthew 28:18-20.
  - These were His final instructions to them just prior to His visible ascension into heaven. Acts 1:6-11.
- ❖ Churches are to be actively involved in the spread of the gospel message within their own locality and region, as well as the regions beyond.
  - The church at Antioch of Syria set the example by sending forth Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Acts 13:2-3.
  - Paul commended the Thessalonians for their outreach into all of Macedonia, Acaia, and wherever they went. 1 Thessalonians 1:8.

- Paul urged the Thessalonians to pray for him and his team members as they sought to spread the gospel. 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1.
  - Paul reminded the church at Corinth that, even though he had not asked them for money in his efforts to plant a church there, the churches of Macedonia did contribute to his personal needs. 2 Corinthians 11:8-9.
  - Paul commended the Philippian believers for their financial assistance in his efforts to plant a church in Corinth. Philippians 4:10-18.
  - Paul told the Colossian believers that the fruit of the gospel was not only evident in their lives when they believed, but was evident “in all the world.” Colossians 1:5-6.
  - Paul instructed that prayer be made in the church for the salvation of all. 1 Timothy 2:1-8.
- ❖ Churches are to be non-discriminatory with respect to age, gender, race, or status.
- Gentiles were to be accepted into the churches, along with Jews. Acts 10:47, 11:18-22.
  - Age, gender, race, or status was not to be an obstacle to working together for the cause of the gospel. Acts 2:17-18, 1 Corinthians 12:13.
  - Paul, in sharing the gospel as an ambassador for Christ, did not look upon people as they appeared to be in the flesh, but what they would become in Christ as a new creature. 2 Corinthians 5:16-17.
- ◆ **The gospel of Christ is that by which we share a common Faith.**

*This means that...*

- ❖ Churches should genuinely love and care for one another, not only for their own ministries.
  - When Paul instructed the Galatian believers to bear one another's burdens, and to do good to all – especially those who were of the “household of faith,” he was speaking to the churches of the region of Galatia, not to just one local church within that locality. Cf. Galatians 1:2 with 6:2 and 6:10.
  - Paul commended the believers in the churches of the Ephesians and the Colossians, when he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and of their love for all the saints. Ephesians 1:15, Colossians 1:4.
  - Paul told the Philippian believers to salute “every saint in Christ Jesus” on his behalf. Philippians 4:21.
  - Paul urged that the hearts of the believers in the areas of Colosse and Laodicea would be “knit together in love.” Colossians 2:1-2.
  - Paul told the Thessalonian believers to greet “all” the brethren with an holy kiss. 1 Thessalonians 5:26.
  - Paul told those to whom he wrote to greet one another with a “kiss of charity.” 1 Peter 5:14.
- ❖ Churches should care about the defense of the gospel of Christ, within their own locality and elsewhere.
  - That's why the Jerusalem Council was called over the issue of requiring that Gentiles be circumcised for salvation. Acts 15:1-23.
  - That's why Paul rebuked Peter to his face in front of the church at Antioch of Syria. Galatians 2:9-11.

- That's why Paul urged the Corinthian believers to separate from idolatrous rituals which might be intermingled with the observance of the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.
- That's why Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus to be on the alert for intrusion of false doctrine. Acts 20:29-31.
- That's why Paul urged the Ephesian believers to watch out for one another, as well as pray for him to be bold in witnessing for Christ as he suffers in prison for the sake of the gospel. Ephesians 6:18-19.
- That's why Paul commended the church at Philippi for their support for him as he suffered in prison for the sake of the gospel. Philippians 1:7.
- That's why Paul urged the Philippians to "strive together for the faith of the gospel" themselves, and to not be terrified by those who opposed them. Philippians 1:27-30.
- That's why Paul wrote to the Colossian believers.
  - ✓ He urged them to not be "moved away from the hope of the gospel." Colossians 1:23.
  - ✓ He told them to pray for his own boldness, while in prison, that he might have opportunities for him to share the gospel. Colossians 4:3.
  - ✓ He exhorted them to be involved themselves in sharing their faith. Colossians 4:6.
  - ✓ And he implored them to not forget him, while he was in prison for the sake of the gospel of Christ. Colossians 4:18.
- That's why Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers.

- ✓ He commended them for suffering for the sake of the gospel in the same way that their Jewish brethren in Christ had suffered in the churches in Judea.  
1 Thessalonians 2:14.
- ✓ It was his concern, that they not be discouraged in the suffering for the gospel, that caused him to send Timothy to give them a word of encouragement.  
1 Thessalonians 3:3-10.
- ✓ It was this same concern which prompted the second epistle to the Thessalonians.  
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12.
- That's why Paul wrote Timothy.
  - ✓ He reminded Timothy, that the reason for his sending him to Ephesus, was for him to defend the gospel against those who were seeking to teach the Mosaic Law in the church. 1 Timothy 1:3.
  - ✓ He warned Timothy to not make a shipwreck of his faith, as had Hymenaeus and Alexander.  
1 Timothy 1:18-20.
  - ✓ He urged Timothy to not be ashamed of Paul in his suffering imprisonment in Rome for the sake of the gospel. 2 Timothy 1:8.
  - ✓ He expressed regret that all in Asia had "turned away" from him, when he was imprisoned for the second time in Rome, with the exception of Onesiphorus who had sought to do all he could to assist Paul with his personal needs.  
2 Timothy 1:15-18.
  - ✓ He exhorted Timothy to teach the same things, he had heard from Paul, to faithful men who would be "able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:2.

- ✓ And he motivated Timothy to be faithful in suffering afflictions for the sake of the gospel, even as Paul had, by expressing confidence in future rewards for all who do so. 2 Timothy 4:1-8.
- That's why Paul wrote Titus.
  - ✓ He told him to ordain elders who would be able to defend the gospel against those who were subverting "whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." Titus 1:5-11.
  - ✓ And he exhorted Titus to reject a heretic after he had been warned twice. Titus 3:10-11.
- That's why Peter wrote his epistle, to cause his intended readers to realize that the sufferings they experienced for the cause of the gospel of Christ was common to their brethren around the world.  
1 Peter 5:9.
- That's why John wrote to the elect lady, to warn her against assisting false teachers as they traveled from house to house, spreading false doctrine about Christ.  
2 John 10-11.
- That's why Jesus gave His commendations and warnings to seven local churches in Asia, and said that his message to them was what He had to say to all local churches. Revelation 2:7,11,17, 29: 3:6,13,22.

**It is proper because the concept of the *universal church* supports the need for interdependence between local churches, without compromising or sacrificing independence.**

◆ **Paul viewed the individual believers and separate local churches to be part of the church of God in general.**

- He considered his persecution of believers, prior to his salvation, as being an attack against the church of God in general. 1 Corinthians 15:9 (note the singular “church”).
- He addressed the believers at Corinth as being the “church of God,” along with all who had called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. 1 Corinthians 1:2.

◆ **Paul revealed a mystery God had given him regarding the church; and that is the fact that every believer, in this dispensation, is regarded as being Christ’s one body on earth, or which He is in heaven as the Head.**

- As the Head, Christ fills His body on earth with divine power for service. Ephesians 1:22-23.
- Jews and Gentiles are “fellow citizens” in that one body. Ephesians 2:14-22.
- Jews and Gentiles are “fellow heirs” in that one body. Ephesians 3:6.
- The universal church on earth is a cause for angels in heaven to recognize the manifold wisdom of God. Ephesians 3:10.
- Deceased saints in this dispensation and those still living on the earth are said to be one family. Ephesians 3:15.
- Paul’s prayer is that all saints in that one body on earth experience the power of the indwelling Christ for function on earth in divine service, to the glory of God. Ephesians 3:18-21.
- Christ is made Head of the church, that in all things He might have the preeminence. Colossians 1:18.

- Paul rejoices in his sufferings on behalf of the body of Christ. Colossians 1:24.
  - Christ, as the Head, is the nourisher of His body on earth. Colossians 2:19.
- ◆ **And because we are one body with Christ, we serve as His priests on earth, with Jesus in heaven ministering for us as our great High Priest.**
- Paul viewed his ministry, and that of others, as a priestly function, and used priestly terminology throughout his epistles to describe those ministries. Cf. Romans 15:16, Philippians 4:18.
  - The writer of the book of Hebrews emphasizes the fact that the order of the priesthood has been changed, with believers today functioning as fellow priests with Christ being the High Priest. Cf. Hebrews 1:9, 3:1, 8:1, 13:15-16.
  - Peter tells the believers that they are living stones of one “spiritual house” or household of a holy priesthood, who are to be offering up “spiritual sacrifices” unto God as a function of their priestly ministry on earth. 1 Peter 2:5.
  - Peter tells the believers to whom he writes that they are a “royal priesthood, a “holy nation,” a “peculiar people,” who are to be showing forth that fact by their conduct before unbelievers. 1 Peter 2:9.
  - John praises Christ for the fact that He has not only “washed us from our sins in his own blood,” but that He has also “made us kings and priests unto God.” Revelation 1:5-6.
- ◆ **Because we are one body, every believer should view his or her actions as to their effect, for good or for bad, upon the body of Christ in general.**

- Paul warns the Corinthians against intermingling idolatrous rituals with the Lord's Supper, because of the fact that what they are doing is harmful to the body of Christ in general. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.
  - Paul urged the Colossian believers to make an effort to be at peace among themselves, because of their calling into one body. Colossians 3:15.
- ◆ **Because we are one body, every believer should view their individual contribution as being interdependent with one another.**

- Paul reminds the Corinthians, that because they are one body, and yet many different members of that body, that they should recognize their interdependence upon one another in the function of spiritual gifts.  
1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

Note: The fact that Paul is speaking of the universal church, and not just the church at Corinth, is clear from the fact that he lists the spiritual gifts God has given for the profit of the church at large, beginning with the apostles. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28.

- Paul exhorted all of the believers at Ephesus to recognize their interdependence upon each other in the function of spiritual gifts and ministry. Ephesians 4:1-16.

Note: The fact that Paul is speaking of the universal church, and not only of the church at Ephesus, is clear from what he has had to say about the mystery of God for this dispensation in the first three chapters.

- Peter urged every believer to minister to one another in the area of the spiritual gifts God had given him or her.  
1 Peter 4:10-11.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Just as the total independence and autonomy of the local church is biblically supported, so is the concept of interdependence. Yet the

intrusion of false doctrine, which has been tolerated throughout church history, has made it impossible for churches to demonstrate the kind of unity and interdependence which was observed in the first century. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible for a local church today to practice interdependence with other churches, without sacrificing its own independence or compromising its doctrinal convictions.

Note: See the suggested contract of agreement, which is included as an attachment to this document.

Interdependence, apart from denominationalism, would have to be entered into between churches on a selective basis, and should perhaps be subject to a review on a year-to-year basis. But Bible believing, bible practicing churches in America today, must learn to work together for the cause of the Gospel and the cause of Missions around the world.

We have not, nor will we be able, to – on our own - keep up with the pressing demand for missionaries to reach those who have never yet heard the blessed truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical concept of interdependence, which was so successful in the spread of the gospel in the first century, will be useful to the church of today, provided that interdependence is practiced without sacrificing a church's independence, and without compromising a church's biblical convictions.

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

### **Statement of Purpose**

1. In recognition of the fact that the local churches mentioned in Scripture were independent and autonomous..
2. And in recognition of the fact that these same local churches demonstrated a sense of interdependence with other churches of like faith, without sacrificing either their independence or autonomy,...
3. We, the membership of (church A) and (church B) do hereby agree to enter into his partnership agreement as stated below.

### **Basis of Cooperation**

1. That the membership of both churches subscribe to a mutually approved doctrinal statement.
2. That the membership of both churches renew this agreement on an annual basis.
3. That the membership of both churches agree that this Partnership Agreement is not a legally binding document.
4. That there be no interference, on the part of one church, with the internal matters and government of the other church.
5. That this agreement in no way be considered to be a means to acquire the monies or property of the partner church.
6. That joint projects be entered into, by mutual agreement, on a case-by-case basis.
7. That any joint project, involving investment in finances and property, be mutually agreed to by both churches, specifying such matters as to the type of project, the amount of investment, and the oversight and supervision of the project. There shall not be any type of cooperative effort in which the participating churches no long have any voice in such matters, so long as the partnership exists.

### **Purpose for Cooperation**

1. The sharing in mutual thanksgiving, prayer requests, and concerns.
2. The sharing in efforts to evangelize respective communities.
3. The sharing in joint projects, whereby more can be accomplished.
4. The sharing in missionary support or missionary related projects.
5. The enhancement of the various ministries of each local church.
6. The bonding together of believers of like-minded churches, without becoming locked into continual cooperation through denominational ties.