

SERMON OUTLINE:

(Sermon by Gary L. Grizzell, preached May 10, 1998, Sunday Night Sermon at the Alexandria Church of Christ)

Title: Church Autonomy & Missionary Societies (and the Herald of Truth program today)

Introduction:

1. I would like to say I appreciate the attitude of a willingness to study God's Word on your part.
2. I hope that what I have to say will in some way make a contribution to our understanding and will be received in the spirit in which it is intended — a desire to discuss in love what the Word of God teaches about a crucial subject.

Body:

1. **It is my conviction that while a respect for the authority of the New Testament is absolutely necessary in regard to studying the issue of church autonomy, it is also necessary to know how to rightly divide the Word of Truth —**
 - a. Col. 3:17 - we must respect Bible authority
 - b. 2 Tim. 2:15 -- then we must rightly divide the Word, i.e. we must take the Biblical evidence and properly interpret it.
2. **Each congregation is autonomous, that is, self-governing under Christ**
 - a. Mt. 28:18; Col. 1:18 -- Christ is the authority, the head.
 - b. Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17 -- Elders under Christ, have authority for expedient matters.
3. **The work of the church is three-fold:**
 - 1) Edification, Benevolence and Evangelism --
 - * Eph. 4:12;
 - * Acts 2:44- 45; 4:35; Acts 6:1-4
 - * Mk. 16:15; Mt. 28:19-20
4. **In carrying out these three works, elders can know that the New Testament (which law men are accountable to in the Christian Age, Gal. 6:2) authorizes by:**
 - 1) Direct Command,
 - 2) Approved Account of Action (example),
 - 3) Implication (implicit teaching or general {generic} authority).
 - * Any three of these may be used to prove a religious doctrine or practice as authorized by Christ.
5. **Elders have authority in the decision-making process with regard to optional matters of the**

church, that is — they have the authority to make the final decisions in matters of expediency.

- a. Heb. 13:7, 17 - obey them that have the rule over you, implies someone must be subject.
6. **An example of an expediency would be the building of a meeting house for worship.**
 - a. The Lord's church (the elders of a church) have New Testament authority to take money from the church treasury in order to build a meeting house in order to assemble.
 - b. Hebrews 10:25 is a passage which teaches Christians to assemble together for worship to God and therefore authorizes (by implication or general authority) the elders to use the Lord's money to build a building.
 7. **Churches may cooperate in BENEVOLENT matters.**
 - a. In Acts 11:27-30 a plurality of churches did cooperate in benevolent matters.
 - b. This Acts 11 passage also authorizes churches to cooperate in spiritual matters.
 - * Including the preaching of the gospel (involving the Lord's treasury) by implication. If not, why not?
 8. **Churches may cooperate in SPIRITUAL matters.**
 - a. In Acts 15:22-35 a plurality of churches did cooperate in spiritual matters.
 - b. Note here that this was a non-benevolent matter wherein one church (the Jerusalem church) cooperated with another church (the Antioch church).
 - c. Questions for those who bind where God has not bound — In view of Acts 15:22-35:
 - 1) Who paid for the material (parchment, or whatever it was made of) upon which the word of God was written and sent from the Jerusalem church to the Antioch church?
 - 2) Which church was the sending church of the preachers who went up to Antioch (the receiving church) to preach to the Antioch church?
 - 3) If the Jerusalem church could pay for the material (upon which the word of God was written) and send it to another congregation, would not this authorize a church today to take money from the church treasury and buy a Bible for another church?
 - 4) And if a church may send a free Bible to another church, is it not the case that a

church could instead send the money for that Bible? (with the understanding that the receiving church could then purchase a Bible).

9. **It has been puzzling to me that those of the noncooperation group generally teach that: WHEN IT IS FOR BENEVOLENCE SEND TO THE CHURCH, BUT WHEN IT IS FOR EVANGELISM SEND TO THE PREACHER.**
 - a. Their argument is that when congregation P sends money to congregation Q for evangelistic purposes, that this somehow places congregation Q (the receiving church) in a position of authority over congregation P (the sending church).
 - b. Thus, the faulty argument says that the receiving church has become a Missionary Society.
10. **If you hold to such a view as described above will you tell me — Why is it not the case that when the sending church (P) sends the Lord's money DIRECTLY TO THE PREACHER (of congregation Q), that this does not place the preacher of congregation Q in authority over the sending church? By the same line of reasoning why does not this situation of — IF IT IS FOR EVANGELISM SEND DIRECTLY TO PREACHER — create a One-Man-Missionary-Society?**
11. **These statements and questions have been made in a desire to respect the authority of God's Word and also to rightly divide it. I certainly would not want to loose where God has not loosed (thus, subtracting from God's Word), but neither do I wish to bind where God's Word has not bound (adding to God's Word).**
12. **Now that the NT doctrine of church cooperation has been established consider the ABUSE of this church cooperation doctrine in preaching the gospel.**
13. **Imagine this situation:**
 - 1) An eldership decides to have a TV program of evangelism.
 - 2) The elders should oversee this program.
 - 3) The elders may ask other congregations to participate in order that a wider audience may be reached.
 - 4) The churches which participate will send their support each month to the overseeing (sponsoring) congregation.
 - 5) The participating churches are doing two things by cooperating with the sponsoring church:

- (1) They are assisting another church in preaching the gospel to the lost - Mk. 16:15.
 - (2) Each church that is praying for the work, writing letters of encouragement, sending funds — is also doing something to fulfill its own responsibility in the great commission.
- 6) This is well and good.
- * Col. 3:17 — is authority for this — the arrangement is scriptural.

14. But now imagine an ABUSE of this church cooperation principle — i.e. organizationally, the setup, or arrangement.

- 1) Suppose that eldership decides to establish a separate, non-profit organization with it's own board of directors to oversee this work.
- 2) The participating congregations are now (ONLY WHEN PRESSED) told that there is no legal connection between this organization and the church that previously had overseen the TV program.
- 3) The funding sent by the cooperating churches now — never goes through the church treasury but through the separate, non-profit organization.
- 4) In the name of expediency a substitute for the church has been set up.
 - * A humanly originated organization — not a divinely originated organization.
 - * A Missionary Society — though they may not call it such, that is what it is.

15. Excuses are offered for establishing a Missionary Society:

- 1) "But because of the huge sums of money coming in we needed to set it up this way."
 - * ANSWER: Get you a qualified church treasurer!
- 2) "We created this separate institution to protect ourselves in case we are sued as was the church in the Marion Quinn case years ago."
 - * ANSWER: If the church is sued for practicing discipline according to God's will, then let the church be sued.
 - Acts 4:19-20; Acts 5:29
 - Since when is fear of being sued an acceptable excuse for the eldership of a church establishing an unscriptural, separate, non-profit organization?
 - There is never any excuse for departing from the NT pattern of church government!

16. The church of the Lord has faced this problem before and continues to face it today.