

## Independent Churches - A Biblical Defense

- I. Denominations, associations, conventions, districts, synods, dioceses, and any other type of "church" hierarchies are unbiblical.
  1. There are no Popes, Patriarchs, Major Archbishops, Cardinals, Primate, Metropolitan, Archbishops, or Diocesan Bishops in the Bible (Catholicism).
  2. There are no Archdioceses or Dioceses in the Bible (Catholicism and Lutheranism).
  3. There are no General Conferences, Council of Bishops, or Judicial Councils in the Bible (Methodism).
  4. There are no Sessions, Presbyteries (in the Presbyterian denominational sense of the word), Synods, or General Assemblies in the Bible (Presbyterianism).
  5. There are no General Councils, Conferences, Districts, Presidents, Vice Presidents, or District Superintendents in the Bible (Christian and Missionary Alliance-ism)
  6. There are no Conventions, Associations, Conferences, or Unions of churches in the Bible (some Baptists - Southern Baptist, Primitive Baptist, etc.).
  
- II. The word "church" in the Bible refers to only three things:
  1. A local congregation of baptized believers who assemble together to be taught about God and to worship Him (**Act 11:26**).
    - A. Church *n.* - III. 10. A congregation of Christians locally organized into a society for religious worship and spiritual purposes, under the direction of one set of spiritual office-bearers.
    - B. There are many local churches (**Rom 16:4; 1Th 2:14; Rev 1:4**).
    - C. Local churches are named by their geographical location (**Act 13:1; Rom 16:1; 1Co 1:2**).
    - D. Each local congregation is "the church" (**1Co 6:4; 1Ti 3:5**), not part of the church.
    - E. Each local congregation is "the whole church" (**Rom 16:23; 1Co 14:23**), not part of the whole church.
    - F. Each local congregation is "*the* body of Christ" (**1Co 12:27**), not part of the body of Christ.
  2. The institution of the local church.
    - A. Jesus built His church in Jerusalem which was a local church and promised that the *institution* of the local church would never be destroyed (**Mat 16:18**).
      - i. Jesus was not referring to the local church at Jerusalem *alone* when He said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it because the local church in Jerusalem came to an end in 70AD when Jerusalem was destroyed.
      - ii. It was rather the *institution* of the local church, which is the kingdom of God (**Dan 2:44**), that Jesus promised would not come to an end.
    - B. There will be glory given to God in the church until the end of time (**Eph 3:21**).
      - i. This cannot be speaking of a particular local church because all local churches come and go: none have lasted from the first century until now.
      - ii. It is rather referring to the *institution* of the local church.
      - iii. There will always be one or more local churches on this earth giving glory to God until the last day of time.
  3. The congregation of all of God's redeemed elect from all time.
    - A. This church is called the general assembly and church of the firstborn (**Heb 12:23**).

- B. This church is the bride of Christ for which He died (**Eph 5:25-27**).
- C. This church does not and cannot assemble on earth, but assembles in heaven.

III. The word "church" in the Bible never refers to a denomination, association, convention, synod, diocese, group of congregations, or any other type of "church" hierarchy.

1. When more than one church is addressed in the Bible, they are called "churches", not "the church" (**Rom 16:16; 1Co 16:19**).
2. There is no office given in the NT to oversee multiple congregations or unbiblical organizations such as denominations, associations, conventions, synods, dioceses, etc. (the office of apostle will be addressed in Section IX).
3. A bishop is the overseer of a local church, not a "diocese" of congregations.
  - A. Bishop *n.* - 1. A spiritual superintendent or overseer in the Christian Church.
  - B. A bishop, an elder, and a pastor are three different titles for the same office (**Tit 1:5-7; Act 20:17,28; Eph 4:11-12**).
  - C. Pastor *n.* - 1. A herdsman or shepherd. Now *unusual*. 2. A shepherd of souls; one who has the spiritual oversight over a company or body of Christians, as bishop, priest, minister, etc.; spec. the minister in charge of a church or congregation, with particular reference to the spiritual care of his 'flock'.
  - D. If a bishop is the overseer of a diocese of congregations, then why did *the church* at Philippi have "bishops"? (**Phi 1:1 c/w Phi 4:15**)

IV. Individual churches are addressed in the Bible, not denominations, associations, or groups of churches (**1Co 1:2; 1Th 1:1**).

1. Jesus addressed the seven churches in Asia individually, not collectively (**Rev 2-3**).
  - A. Jesus did not address the book of Revelation to "the church in Asia", nor "the Asian Church", nor "the West-Asian Convention of Churches", nor "the Asian Association of Churches", but rather "to the seven *churches* which are in Asia" (**Rev 1:4**).
  - B. Jesus praised or upbraided them based on their own actions (**Rev 2-3**).
    - i. One church was not condemned or held responsible for the sins of another.
    - ii. One church was not commended for the good works of another.
  - C. If "the church" in the Bible refers to a denomination consisting of many congregations such as the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, the Alliance Church, etc., then, for instance, how could one Lutheran congregation be held accountable for the sins of another Lutheran congregation in another country if "the Lutheran Church" were condemned in a letter by Jesus Christ for its sin?
  - D. It obviously could not.
2. The letter to the *churches* of Galatia is an exception to the general rule in the Bible that churches are addressed individually, in that the epistle was addressed to more than one church (**Gal 1:2**).
  - A. But even when Paul wrote to multiple congregations in Galatia, he addressed his letter to "*the churches* of Galatia" (**Gal 1:2**), not to "*the church* of Galatia" or to "the Galatian Church."
  - B. Since there was more than one church in Galatia that had been infected with the same heresy, Paul efficiently addressed them together.

- C. Paul did similarly when he instructed the church at Colosse to read the letter that he sent to the church of the Laodiceans, and for the Colossians to likewise read their letter (**Col 4:16**).
  - D. He did so because there were many general doctrinal and practical topics that were addressed in his epistles that were applicable to all local churches.
- V. Many of the Primitive Baptist churches are members of associations and oftentimes have elders from one or more churches governing, meddling in, or influencing another church.
1. This is unbiblical.
  2. Christians should not be busybodies involved in other men's matters, and neither should pastors or churches (**1Pe 4:15; Pro 26:17**).
  3. God warns His people against associating themselves with others (**Isa 8:9-13; Isa 5:8-10**).
  4. Associate - 1. *trans.* To join (persons, or one person with (to arch.) another), in (to obs.) common purpose, action, or condition; to link together, unite, combine, ally, confederate.
  5. When one pastor or church associates itself with another (such as Philadelphia with Laodicea, hypothetically), it would end up being a partaker of other men's sins (**1Ti 5:22**).
  6. When a church communes together, they are all partakers together (**1Co 10:17**).
    - A. Primitive Baptist churches that commune with other churches in the association who are in moral sin or doctrinal error would be partaking with sinners (**Psa 50:18; Eph 5:3-7**) and fellowshiping with darkness (**Eph 5:11**).
    - B. A local church can guard against this *within their local church* by exercising church discipline and excluding commonly known sinners from the Lord's Table (**1Co 5:1-13**).
      - i. Paul's instruction in 1Co 5 was to the local church at Corinth.
        - a. No other church or pastor was told to exercise discipline on the church of Corinth, and therefore no other church can or should do it.
        - b. The argument from silence applies here (**Heb 7:13-14**).
      - ii. A local church would likely not be aware of a sin problem in another church in a different location that they were communing with once or twice a year.
      - iii. If they did know about it and tried to exclude that church from their communion, they would be exercising authority that was never given to them.
      - iv. To do so would require that an unscriptural office be created wherein one elder would have authority over other churches in the association.
      - v. This is exactly what the Primitive Baptists have done: the position is called the Moderator of the association who is elected by Delegates sent from the several churches in the association.
      - vi. Just to read the previous sentence should make sick any Christian who takes the Bible as his only rule for faith and practice.
      - vii. Jesus is the head of the local church (**Col 1:18 c/w 1Co 12:27**) and to put another person or office between Jesus and His local church is to usurp His authority.
      - viii. One unscriptural thing leads to another -- iniquity unto iniquity (**Rom 6:19**).

VI. The Bible knows nothing of one pastor or bishop having the rule over churches that have their own pastor.

1. A bishop is the overseer of a local church, not a "diocese" of congregations.
  - A. Bishop *n.* - 1. A spiritual superintendent or overseer in the Christian Church.
  - B. A bishop, an elder, and a pastor are three different titles for the same office (**Tit 1:5-7; Act 20:17,28**).
  - C. If a bishop is the overseer of a diocese of congregations, then why did *the church* at Philippi have "bishops"? (**Phi 1:1 c/w Phi 4:15**)
2. Each pastor receives a ministry from God (**Act 12:25; Act 20:24; 2Ti 4:5**).
  - A. A pastor's ministry reaches only as far as the people to whom God has sent him to minister (**2Co 10:13**).
  - B. A pastor is to take heed to the ministry that God has given him (**Col 4:17**) and not meddle in another man's ministry (**2Co 10:14-15; Rom 15:20**).
  - C. A pastor is to feed and rule his own church, as Peter exhorted elders to "feed the flock of God *which is among you*, taking the oversight thereof" (**1Pe 5:2**).
  - D. A pastor is also to do the work of an evangelist (**2Ti 4:5**), in which he would go into other places, preach the gospel, baptize converts, and form them into churches, as did Philip the evangelist (**Act 21:8 c/w Act 8:5,12 c/w Act 9:31**).
  - E. The only time a pastor can oversee more than one church is when he has done the work of an evangelist and started a new church and has not yet ordained an elder to take the oversight of it.

VII. Churches should not be corporations of the State but should be entirely independent of it.

1. The only head of the church is Jesus Christ (**Eph 1:20-23; Eph 4:15-16; Eph 5:23**).
2. The church therefore should not be made a creature of the State by incorporating itself as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt non-profit corporation or association, but should be entirely separate from the State (**Mat 22:21**).
3. If the church becomes a corporation of the State, the State becomes its creator and therefore its head.
4. "The church is not some two-headed freak show." - Stephen Beatty

VIII. One church can be a partaker of another church's charity, but not their communion or authority.

1. There was a time when there was a great drought in Judea and the saints in Jerusalem were in need (**Act 11:28**).
  - A. The disciples in other churches decided to send them relief, which they did by the hands Barnabas and Paul (**Act 11:29-30; Rom 15:25-27**).
  - B. Paul asked other churches to take up a collection to help the saints in the Jerusalem church and gave them instruction on how it was to be done, which they did (**1Co 16:1-3; 2Co 8:10-15; 2Co 9:1-2**).
2. Churches in the Bible also sent greetings to each other and were friendly with each other (**Rom 16:3-5; 1Co 16:19-20**).
3. But helping out another church in need, being friendly, and sending greetings is not at all the same as having authority over them or influencing and meddling in their internal affairs.
4. A church is similar to a family, which is why the members are called brethren (**1Th 2:14**) and are to relate to one another as a family does (**1Ti 5:1-2**).

- A. It is perfectly acceptable for one family to send money or supplies to another family that is in need (**1Ti 5:4**), or to send them a card telling them they are praying for them.
  - B. But it is not at all acceptable for one family to show up for dinner at the other family's house and start telling them how many kids they should have, what should be for dinner, and what furniture they should buy.
  - C. The father would be usurping authority that was not his if he meddled in the affairs of another family.
  - D. So it is with churches: one church or group of churches has no authority from God to meddle in the affairs of another church.
5. A local church is likened to a human body in scripture (**1Co 12:12-18 c/w 1Co 12:27**).
- A. It is honorable for one or more persons (human bodies) to offer acts of charity to another person who is in need (**Gal 6:2**).
  - B. But it is dishonorable for one or more persons to tell another person how to eat, dress, exercise, or style his hair, which is called being a *busybody* (**1Pe 4:15**).
  - C. A person or group of people meddling in another person's business is taking on themselves a responsibility that God never gave them.
  - D. So it is with churches: one church or group of churches has no authority from God to meddle in the affairs of another church.

IX. Objection: wasn't Paul like a pope, denominational leader, or an association moderator who had authority over many congregations?

1. The apostles had authority over many local churches (**2Co 11:28; 1Co 16:1**), but that is not true of men today.
2. There is no office of apostle today because no man currently living could meet the qualifications, which are:
  - A. First: Having been with the original 12 apostles for the entirety of Jesus' earthly ministry (**Act 1:21-22**).
  - B. Second: Having personally witnessed the resurrected Jesus Christ (**Act 1:22**).
  - C. The apostle Paul met the second qualification, having personally seen Jesus Christ after His resurrection (**1Co 9:1**).
  - D. Paul was an exception to the first qualification, being "one born out of due time" (**1Co 15:8**).
  - E. No one living today accompanied with the 12 disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry, nor has personally seen Jesus Christ. Therefore no man has the office of an apostle today.
3. The apostles had authority over multiple local churches because the word of God was still being written by them, and until it was complete, they needed to have the word of God personally given to them.
  - A. Jesus told the apostle Peter that whatever he would bind on earth would be bound in heaven (**Mat 16:19**).
    - i. "Shalt bind" is *future tense* and "shalt be bound" is the *future tense passive voice* which functions in the same way as the *future perfect tense*, which demands that the binding that Peter would do in the future on earth would have already been done by God in heaven.

- ii. In other words, the decrees the apostles made on earth concerning doctrine and practice were first made in heaven by God before they were given to the apostles.
- iii. If the future tense is confusing, then let's bring it into the present tense to simplify it.
  - a. Doing so would have Mat 16:19 read "whatsoever thou *bindest* on earth *is bound* in heaven."
  - b. "Bindest" is *present tense* and "is bound" is *present tense passive voice* which functions in the same way as the *present perfect tense*, demanding that the binding in heaven preceded the binding on earth.
- B. The apostles delivered the word of God and made it binding on the saints on earth.
  - i. When the Pharisees had gone to the church at Antioch and taught the brethren that they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved, the church sent the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, to the church in Jerusalem to ask the other apostles concerning the matter (**Act 15:1-2**).
  - ii. The apostles and elders came together to consider the matter (**Act 15:6**).
  - iii. The apostle Peter weighed in (**Act 15:7-11**) and then the apostle James who was the overseer of the church in Jerusalem gave his sentence that the Gentiles did not have to keep the law of Moses, save for a few items (**Act 15:13-21**).
  - iv. The apostles were all pleased with James' decision and they decided to send Paul and Barnabas with some other men to Antioch to apprise the church of the decree (**Act 15:22-32**).
  - v. Paul continued to deliver the decree throughout the cities where he had previously started churches (**Act 16:4-5**).
- C. Paul would later write letters to the churches under the inspiration of God giving them commandments concerning their faith and order.
- D. Once the New Testament was complete (**Heb 2:3-4**), there was no further need for apostles to write scripture or to have authority over the churches.
- E. The scripture is able to thoroughly furnish the pastor of each local church with all that he needs to teach, instruct, correct, and reprove the church of which God has made him the overseer (**2Ti 3:16-17 c/w Act 20:28**).
- F. One pastor alone can set in order all things that are wanting in a church, up to and including ordaining elders to oversee a church (**Tit 1:5**) which he started when doing the work of an evangelist (**2Ti 4:5**).