sent Peter and John to them" (Acts 8:14). They taught them and even laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit, but nothing is said about any continued accountability to Jerusalem. They don't build church buildings for them, or oversee their work. When Jews and Hellenists accept the gospel in Antioch Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:19-22). While there the text tells us **"When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord"** (Acts 11:23). Like Lipscomb's two neighbors working side by side, this is cooperation, but independence.

Some have argued that the meeting in Jerusalem over the question of Gentile circumcision reveals Jerusalem as a "mother church" with all others acting as her satellites (Acts 15). Certainly throughout church history councils such as Nicea and Trent imagined they were following Jerusalem's example. The problem is Jerusalem had something no other council had—the apostles (Acts 15:6). When the apostles left Jerusalem it became no different from any other congregation.

While no centralized church pattern exists there are examples of cooperation in two key areas: 1) *benevolence* and 2) *evangelism.*

1. Benevolence. Only a few verses after recording the conversions in Antioch we learn of a need in Judea. When Agabus prophesies a famine, the church determines to send **"relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea"** (Acts 11:29). How did they do this? They didn't create a benevolent organization. They didn't solicit funds from other churches and act as a sponsoring church to raise and distribute funds. They gave **"each according to his ability"** (Acts 11:29) and **"sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul"** (Acts 11:30).

2. Evangelism. In contrast to this we see a different pattern as it relates to preaching the gospel. We just saw the example of Jerusalem sending out men to teach the gospel. Antioch is well-known for sending out Paul on three preaching trips. How was this done? There's no missionary society nor collection from other churches to support Paul. Actually we're told nothing about financial support from Antioch for Paul's travels.

We are told about churches individually supporting preachers directly. Paul expresses his gratitude to the saints in Philippi, writing:

> **Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities** (Phil. 4:15-16).

Unlike the pattern of benevolence, there is no example of churches sending to other churches for them to support preachers. In Scripture support is always sent directly to the preacher.

These simple patterns should be followed today. They demonstrate cooperation in the cause of Christ, avoid the extremes of anarchy and isolation. They do not use unscriptural organizations that elevate one church over another nor do they cause one church to surrender responsibilities it should carry out for itself.

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Faithful Sayings



Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Church Government and Cooperation (2)

By Kyle Pope

In the previous issue of *Faithful Sayings* I shared some of the material I will present in October in the study on Institutionalism. In this issue I offer the second portion of this material on the subject of cooperation.

Extreme Views of Autonomy

We noted in our previous study that the Bible teaches local churches are independent and autonomous in government. Unfortunately these principles of autonomy have occasionally led to overreactions in two different extremes: 1) *anarchy* or 2) *isolation.*

1. Anarchy. *Anarchy* is "a state of disorder due to absence or non-recognition of authority" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). Some imagine independence means we do whatever we choose. In one sense no one in Christ is *autonomous.* Paul declared, **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"** (Gal. 2:20). We have freewill, but we cannot act independently of Christ. Paul taught that in obedience to the gospel we become **"slaves of God"** (Rom. 6:22).

While local churches can be said to be *autonomous* in organization, even in a congregational sense all must submit to the headship of Christ. God the Father set Christ **"to be Head over all things to the church"** (Eph. 1:22). Elders, as shepherds of a local flock follow the guidance of **"the Chief Shepherd"** (1 Pet. 5:4). Elders (and local churches) possess no legislative authority to draft new laws. The literal wording of Jesus' statement in Matthew 18:18 makes this clear. When congregations follow God's word, **"Whatever you bind on the earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven"** (GLT).

2. Isolation. While it isn't the business of one congregation to meddle in the affairs of another, belonging to God's family means something. John taught those who have fellowship with God the Father, are in fellowship with all others in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3). In Christ, we are brethren. We must **"love the brotherhood"** (1 Pet. 2:17). Congregational independence doesn't mean we ignore the spiritual well being of our brethren in other places. Paul didn't do that. When the churches in Galatia gave way to error, he wrote to them (Gal. 1:6-9). Jesus led John to write to seven different churches of vastly different strength and weakness at a time when John himself was exiled on Patmos (Rev. 1-3).

Autonomy doesn't mean we should ignore apostasy and rebellion or close our eyes to the needs of those who aren't members of our own congregation. That doesn't mean we should become private detectives, talebearers, or gossips, but if carried too far we can allow an extreme concept of autonomy to lead us to pass **"by on the other side"** while our brethren lie in the ditch of error, hardship, and sin (cf. Luke 10:31-32). That's not love and that's not the Biblical pattern.

Church Cooperation

If anarchy and isolation are not appropriate ways to demonstrate congregational independence, what does the Bible teach us about how churches should cooperate in the cause of Christ? There always seems to be a gnawing conflict within us that imagines if only we could consolidate our efforts, at last the cause of practicing and restoring NT Christianity would finally rise above all other religious movements. In 1988 Gordon Ferguson, in an article advocating what was then known as *The Boston Movement* wrote, "one real hindrance to brotherhood unity has been an ungodly view of church autonomy." He argued that church autonomy "guaranteed that the world will never be evangelized" and thus concluded that autonomy is "contrary to the very purpose of God and is sinful" (*Boston Bulletin*, "Progressive Revelation," Part 4, June 5, 1988). Only five years later this movement formally organized itself as a distinct denominational entity under the name *International Churches of Christ*. This shouldn't surprise us. If our attitude towards serving God no longer demands biblical authority for what we practice, whatever we choose will be acceptable.

From the beginning men have gravitated towards efforts to expand, grow, centralize, and make a name for ourselves. Do we remember the wording when the Tower of Babel was built? They said, **"Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves"** (Gen. 11:4)—but God wasn't pleased with that. When the Israelites wanted a king, they said, **"make us a king to judge us like all the nations"** (1 Sam. 8:5). They thought being like everyone else was the answer. In reality by doing that they were rejecting God! The Lord told Samuel, **"they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them"** (1 Sam. 8:7). The questions we now face about cooperation don't stem from such carnal motivations as notoriety or status. I'm sure they come from a sincere desire to win souls to Christ, but even so, can we ask others to reject unscriptural innovations while using unscriptural innovations to win them over?

Some of the earliest struggles within the Restoration Movement concerned cooperation. Associations distinct from the local church were formed and disbanded. Brethren debated whether such cooperative efforts were proper or not. Ultimately, one of the major issues that divided churches of Christ from what became the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church) denomination was the missionary society. We won't take the time to explore these in detail, but I would urge anyone studying this subject to read "Congregational Cooperation: A Historical Study," by Earl Irvin West. This series was written by brother West before he changed his views on the subject. It was first published in 1953 in the *Gospel Advocate*, then reprinted that same year in *Gospel Guardian* and *Preceptor*. It is available online at: http://grandoldbook.com/congregationalcooperation.pdf. Brother West explored in detail the debates and struggles over how churches can and should work together. It's clear from his study that this is not a new question or a new problem.

I will draw our attention to how one key figure during this period addressed the question of cooperation to move us back to the biblical text. Brother West writes about an exchange between brother David Lipscomb and a converted Methodist named John T. Poe in 1869 over the question of cooperation. West rhetorically asks the question, "But when a church finds a work to do which it cannot do alone, how shall it act then?" To which he quotes Lipscomb's answer:

> Precisely as the family acts, when it finds itself unable to roll its own logs, raise its own house, harvest its own grain or pick its own cotton. Let it make known its weakness and wants to its nearest sister congregations or congregation. And let these congregations without any human organization, say whether they will aid the one asking aid or not and send the aid to sustain the teacher, or feed the poor, as congregations, without the intervention of any human organization. So soon then as the work is done each congregation is left perfectly free to pursue its own course without any entangling alliances, with burdensome and frail human machinery or with its sister congregations."

Before this, West didn't quote Lipscomb, but explained him to have expressed it this way:

> Two farmers, living as neighbors, work side by side. One has work to do that he cannot do himself. So, he asks the aid of his neighbor. Each farmer, pursuing his own independent course, cooperates. The emergency that necessitated the call for aid ends, and the farmers are left free of any encumbering machinery.

How does this match the biblical record? Is this how churches in the NT cooperated in the cause of Christ?

Cooperation in the New Testament

What I find intriguing about brother Lipscomb's view is how it avoids the extreme of isolation while maintaining absolute independence. I believe this is exactly what is found in the biblical record.

The NT does not teach a centralized concept of church co-operation. Although the church began in Jerusalem it's never portrayed as holding authority over other congregations. The persecution of Saul and the death of Stephen led to the scattering of saints from Jerusalem **"except the apostles"** (Acts 8:1). When Philip converted some in Samaria we read, **"when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they**