



## Independent and Autonomous Churches

God's plan for local churches is that they are independent and autonomous. What does this mean?

It means that God wants local churches not to be subject to a denominational headquarters or central office (independent). It means that God wants local churches to be self-ruled and self-governing (autonomous). They are not to be independent of God's rule or word but independent of outside rule by man.

While we are all brethren, the Monte Vista church of Christ is not to be involved in the affairs of the Valley congregation, and vice versa. We are two distinct entities. We have our leaders, treasury, assemblies, members, and responsibilities. A failure to adhere to God's desire for us to be independent and autonomous leads to unscriptural practices.

### The Limitations of a Local Church

- Oversight of Elders
  - Where does God want elders appointed (Acts 14:23)?
  - Who are elders to oversee and shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-3)?
  - When do elders violate the autonomy of another church?
- The Treasury
  - How was the treasury in Corinth controlled (1 Corinthians 16:3)?
  - How did local churches in Macedonia and Achaia aid needy saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:1-14; 9:1-5)?
  - Why was it necessary for Jerusalem to receive relief from other local churches (2 Corinthians 8:13-14)?

- Receiving Benevolence
  - Read Acts 11:29-30. Does a church in need surrender oversight when receiving aid from another church?
  - Does the giving church maintain control over the funds once they give them to a needy church? Who has oversight over the money once the needy church receives it?
  - Who is responsible for distributing funds among the needy saints once received from a giving church?
- Can you think of other biblical examples demonstrating local churches' independence?

### **What Happens When God's Will Is Not Obeyed?**

- The sponsoring church system is created. This is not authorized in the Bible!
- Eldershops do not shepherd the flock among them.
- Local churches give up independence and control of their treasury.
- A "churchhood" concept is created. The universal church is made up of individual Christians, not local churches.
- Churches with abundance get involved in helping churches that are not truly in need.
- Local churches take on larger works than God gave them.
- God's plan and wisdom are not respected!