

The Autonomous Church

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the importance of local church autonomy, arguing that God deals with local churches individually and that central control and denominationalism can be detrimental to the health and growth of local churches.

Duration: 47:42

Scripture: Revelation 1:12

Topics: "Autonomous Church"

Description

The video discusses the concept of franchising in the church and contrasts it with God's way of working with differences. It highlights how some churches replicate a formula that works in one church and apply it to other locations, even going as far as having the same sermon and worship. This approach is seen as a show and lacks central control or authority. The speaker emphasizes that God values diversity and uniqueness, as seen in the differences in our bodies and even in the seven golden lampstands mentioned in Revelation 1:12.

Transcript

Turn with me please to the book of Acts chapter 11, Acts chapter 11, and we're still dealing with a church, and I want to deal this evening with the subject of the autonomy of local churches, and I struggled a little bit about this as to whether we, you know, whether this is really important, and I decided that it is important. It's not just of academic importance, but I believe it's very important to a church like this, which is autonomous, meaning, by autonomous we mean independent in a sense, but it's not really independent. There's a difference between being autonomous and being independent.

All of us, as families, we are autonomous. The church does not interfere with the way that you run your family. Each family has to supply its own financial needs.

Each family makes its own rules. Each family decides how many children they're going to have, and those sorts of things, and so each family is autonomous, but each family is not independent. We fellowship together.

We are one with one another. What one does impacts on everybody else. We are concerned for one another.

We have a relationship with one another, so we are not independent as families, but we are autonomous, and so we are self-sufficient, self-supporting as families, but we still have a relationship. Now, in the same way, local churches or churches are autonomous, meaning that they make their own decisions, they run their own finances. We'll talk about the details this evening, but it does not mean that they are independent.

We cannot say that we do not need, and I'll deal with this next week in great and much greater detail as to what those relationships are outside with other churches, but we cannot say we are independent of all other churches, and that we have nothing to do with all other churches. That's simply not the Spirit of Christ, and that's simply not the reality. The reality is that the teaching that we receive tonight is influenced and impacted by other churches and other teachers.

The hymns and the choruses that we sang tonight were written by men in other churches. Much of what we do is affected in one way or the other by other churches, and we ought to be, in fact, to a greater degree than we are in relationship with other churches, but we'll talk about that next week. So when we speak about autonomy, we don't mean independence.

There is a subtle difference between the two, but read with me from the book of Acts chapter 11 verses 19 through the end of the chapter 28. Sorry, to verse 30. Acts chapter 11 verse 19.

Now those who were scattered from the persecution that arose after Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, or the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 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. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed from Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

And so it was, for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. And in those days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Now the question obviously is, why is this important? Well it's important because not so much it is not such a big deal today, but it was 20 or 30 years ago. It still is a big deal to many today. And that is the issue of denominations.

When I meet people in the street or in the business or wherever, when they hear that I'm a preacher, the first question they want to know is, which denomination? And I'm sure you get asked the same question.

You say, we go to Burbank Community Church. Oh, is it Catholic? Is one of the popular questions you get down here.

And you say, no it's not Catholic. Well is it then, what is it then? Is it Assemblies of God or is it Baptist? In other words, trying to put us into some kind of box and some kind of denomination. Now the issue then this evening really is, should we be part of a denomination? That's why I felt that it's important for us to answer that question.

Because some people feel, well maybe we should be part of a denomination. Why are we autonomous or independent? Why are we non-denominational? Which is probably the answer most of us give people when they say, well you know, we say, well we're an interdenominational, we're a non-denominational church. Now this, look at the scriptures reasons.

Now the word church, that's translated church or assembly in the English, comes from the Greek word Ecclesia. If you're Spanish then you know the same word. Ecclesia, which means those who have been called out.

We've been called out of the world and we're not meeting with the world tonight, we're meeting here as a group of people. And so it simply means those who have been called out or assembly. The word is also used even in Paul's day when there was, he was preaching and there was a great riot and it speaks about the assembly.

Simply meaning the congregational people. In that case it wasn't even Christians, it was just all the people of the city. And so it can mean just a congregation of people.

Now the way the word is used, it's used a hundred and forty-two times in the New Testament. Now you say, well why do I use these statistics? Well it's important for us to get an idea as to how the word is used. And of those hundred and forty-two times, about twenty-two times the word is used concerning, now here's another idea, the universal church.

Now the universal church is not the Catholic church. The word Catholic means universal. It's not the universal church of God.

Universal simply means the church that is made up of all believers, not only on the face of the earth now, but of all time. So when, sometimes the scripture speaks about the whole of the church, which is made up of, I suppose Jesus would be the first, I don't know who would be the first and whoever would be the last believer to be saved before the end of the world. And so all of those believers together would make up the universal church.

In Matthew Jesus says that I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. When he says I will build my church, he's not meaning a local church. He's meaning the whole church of all believers of all time.

And so about twenty-two times of the hundred and forty-two times, so you'll see a very small number of times of the whole number of times when the word church is used in the New Testament, it is used concerning the universal church made up of all believers of all time. The rest of the times, and that makes another ninety-two times, it refers specifically to the local church. Now this is important because most of the time, in other words, when you read the word church it is not referring to the whole church, the universal church.

It's simply meaning a local assembly of believers, the local church. And so the writings in the New Testament are primarily written to local churches. They deal with local churches.

God's dealings is not with the universal church. His dealings is not with denominations. His dealings are with this church and with the next church down the street and the next church down the street.

God does not speak the language of denominations. God does not have a message to the Methodist church in America or to the Baptist church or to whatever. God has a message to Burbank Community Church.

God has a message to whatever the Methodist church down the road is called. He has a message to that particular assembly. That's the way God deals.

He deals with local assemblies with local churches. In the book of Thessalonians, and let's just go to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. We can go to virtually any of the books in the New Testament and many of them begin in this way. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 1. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see that he's writing to the church of the Thessalonians. In Acts chapter 13 verse 1 he speaks about the church at Antioch. But if we go to the book of Galatians, verse, Galatians chapter 1 verse 1. Paul an apostle not from men through man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

And all the brethren who are with me. To the churches of Galatia. Now that's interesting.

When he wrote to the Thessalonians what did he say? To the church. But here he's writing to the churches. Why do you think that is? Well it's simply because Galatia is not a city.

Galatia is a region. It's a province. And so he is writing to all of the churches in that province.

This is one of the few times that he does that. And so you find a principle which we can go to many other scriptures but that you have in those days one church per city. Every city had one church.

And so you could speak about the church of Colossae or the church of Ephesus. But you could not speak about the church of Galatia. Because that would embrace a lot of different churches.

And so to speak about the church of the firstborn of the resurrected or whatever and mean a denomination. That you have to if you if he was going to write if God was to write to let's say the the Baptist Church. Now you see we use that term the Baptist Church.

When we say the Baptist Church and I have nothing against the Baptist Church it's a good church. But when we speak about the Baptist Church what are we meaning? We're meaning a denomination made up of thousands of churches in this in this country. And in fact made up of something like 46 different denominations within what we title the Baptist Church.

But if God was to write to them he would not write to the Baptist Church. He would write to the churches. You see the difference.

God does not. Nowhere in the New Testament does he deal with a group of churches as one unit. But whenever even if he's dealing with more than one church he speaks to them separately and he writes to

each one of those churches separately.

So there is no such thing as a national church. He doesn't write to the church in Israel or the church in Asia. There is no such thing as a regional church.

He does not write to the church in Galatia. He writes to the churches in Galatia. There is no such thing as a church which is based on an individual.

He does not write to the church of churches of Paul or the church of Paul or the denomination of Paul or of Peter or of James or any one of these other of these other men. And neither does he are they churches that are based on a particular doctrine. We just made reference to the to the Baptists and please I have the highest respect for the Baptists.

But at the same time their title the name of their of their denomination is what? Baptist. It's a doctrinal statement. We are different because we baptize.

And others say well we're the church we're the Bible Baptists. In other words we believe the Bible and we baptize. And and so you can go on and on and on.

Now the scripture doesn't make those kinds. He simply writes to the church in Ephesus. And that's all there is.

So there is there is no there is no no separating of churches along any kind of lines whether those are regional or national or doctrinal or personality. There is no division like that. The only division between churches is that of locality.

And so if there is a church in one city and there's a church in another city you have two churches. Now I know that we have a that creates a problem today because there are people who and in fact the headquarters is not very far from here in Anaheim. The descendants of Watchman Nee came from from China.

In fact he died a martyr in in China. But his protege witness Lee fled under Watchman Nee's instruction fled to Taiwan and from Taiwan came to the United States. And they and they find they have the headquarters in in Anaheim.

And they have this teaching they push this teaching to the extreme which they say still say that if you have one city you have to have one church. And so in Burbank you can only have one valid church. And now the question is who's the valid church? Well of course it's it's our church.

We have to be the valid church. And then you have the other extreme of that of that era also because what happens now is that there is a big move in many many evangelical circles to have a central eldership in the local churches. So all the pastors get together and they beginning to form this oversight thing organization this body that will run the church and and bring the churches together in one city.

So you have one city one church in one city. The problem of course is in order to do that you have to sacrifice many many things that are truth and and and you know that's a whole another issue which I don't want to get involved in. But but we simply cannot link hands with people who do not agree on the essentials of the truth.

We we must not divide on things that are not essential. Whether you know whether we whether we wear ties or don't wear ties is not an issue for division. You know whether you know whether we whether we face this way in our service or whether we face that way you know cannot be a basis of division.

But there are other issues that are more serious and that are a basis for division and that we cannot we cannot bridge those those non-essentials and so but these people are trying to to reestablish this idea of one church per city. All right now if we go to the book of Revelation chapter 1 and I I know this is maybe a little bit boring but I think it's important that we establish the the biblical basis for this. You see because one of the problems also is that is that there are many independent churches like this one today and many times they're independent not for biblical reasons but simply because their leaders can't get on with anybody else and so they hive off and they start their own church.

This is very big in Africa. You know every every every Tom Dick and Harry when he thinks he can he can preach a little bit he'll leave the church and he'll take some members and he'll start his own church. Now it's good for us to start many churches but when when it is simply because because I can't you know work under authority that's the wrong reason and in fact there are too many independent or autonomous churches that are autonomous not for biblical reasons but simply because their leaders cannot cannot work with others and that's the wrong reason.

So we need to know the right reasons for doing this. Now in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 we have the letters to the seven churches. We've dealt with these in great detail in the English Department on Sunday mornings and it's very interesting when you look at these seven churches that they were very close together.

They were about 25 miles apart so you could walk from one to the next in one day. That was basically the distance apart. They were in a very very small area maybe I haven't actually measured it but probably I would guess probably in an area as big as Los Angeles County.

Probably that sort of area and yet when you look at them you see that everyone is different. Each one had its own structure. Each one had its own strengths.

Each one had its own weaknesses. Each one had its own doctrinal issues. Each one was very very different.

You don't and if these guys were so close together that if there was any sense in which the New Testament encouraged some kind of central control of the churches you would find that these churches would all look exactly the same. They would not be very very different. The same way as today when you go into a denominational church or whatever denomination.

I think that most of us who've been saved for a while can go into a denominational church without looking at the name outside the door and and within 10 minutes of the service running you have a good idea of what kind of church this is. What kind of denomination it is and so but these churches, these seven churches, each one is different and so it shows us that they had no central control. That there was no central authority dictating how they were to operate.

Each one was being led by God and unfortunately being deceived by the devil independently and so each one of these churches is very very different. But more importantly in Revelation chapter 1 and verse 12 he says, I turned to see the voice that spoke with me and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands and

in the midst of the seven lampstands one like the Son of Man clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band and then down in verse 20 the mystery of the seven stars which you saw my right hand and the seven golden lampstands the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. Now I've read many commentators that have looked at these lampstands and have compared it to the menorah or the lampstand that was in the tabernacle.

Now you remember that in the tabernacle as you came into the holy place on the right hand side was a seven branched candlestick but that lampstand and these are very very different. The lampstand in the book of Exodus and for those who are writing down the scriptures Exodus 25 31 in Exodus 25 31 it is specific that the lampstand of the tabernacle was to be beaten out of one solid piece of gold and so it had and it was specific it had a central stem and it had three branches coming out on the one side and three branches on the other side giving you seven seven lamps not nine like the modern menorahs that the Jewish people use today but it had seven but the the point was that it had a single foot had a single base or pedestal and out of that then came the central one which and then and then three and three giving you seven but when you look at the book of Revelation the picture here is very very different he does not say a seven branched candlestick or lampstand. Lampstand is the better English because these were lamps that were burning and not candles.

He doesn't say that it was a seven branched candlestick what was it there were seven candlesticks seven candlesticks or seven lampstands each one of them as a lampstand on its own where is Jesus in this whole lot he's walking in the midst he's walking between them now you can't walk if you look at the menorah in the Old Testament the seven branched candlestick you can't walk between the menorah you can only walk around it because it was one with seven branches but here it is seven distinct lampstands and Jesus walks between them so what does this tell me I think this is very important very significant because it illustrates this point that we're establishing not just from the scripture from the other scriptures and that is that the church is not a central organization with branches so

that this is a branch of the church in Timbuktu or a branch of the church in New York City but each church is independent each church stands on its own basis on its own foundation and each one of these churches is accountable to Jesus notice that Jesus in writing to these churches doesn't say to them I'm going to get your regional overseer or your district superintendent or your whatever he's going to come and sort your problems out he calls each one of these churches accountable to himself and to the church in Ephesus he says if you do not repent I will remove your lampstand and so he he says but if you overcome these are the blessings and so he's writing to each church and each church receives from him blessing and judgment each church received from him encouragement and each church is

responsible and accountable to Jesus Christ at no stage does he even say to John because John is the writing writer and he is he's probably the oldest surviving apostle of the twelve that's still alive at this time and and we could imagine that maybe Jesus would say well you know when John is released from prison then he'll sort you guys out he'll come in and fix your problems but he doesn't do anything of the sort because those churches are not accountable to John they are accountable to Jesus Christ each one of them independent or autonomous now for man that's not a comfortable thing we don't we don't like that kind of thing because we like formulas we like to find a formula that works and then when that works then we reproduce it again and again and again and so why does McDonald's

make a lot of money well they found a formula that works doesn't work for me but millions of other people can't be wrong and so and so you're going to one McDonald's you're going to the next one and it's exactly the same the menus the same the food is the same the recipe is the same the building is the same the way people dress is the same everything is the same that's the way the world works and in fact they use this in the church today and in the church growth movement there is there is a there is a thing which they now call franchising and they will replicate they will find a formula that works in a particular church and they will replicate that formula in other places to such a degree that sometimes and in some of these examples what they will do is the preacher will preach the

message and he will have the worship team who lead the worship and then they will fly by helicopter to the next church and they will do four or five churches like this on a Sunday and two on a Saturday maybe and they will they will put on the same show because that's all it is it's a show they will run the same worship with the same sermon with the same formula because that works and they have they have other different ways I've actually seen a video of them running where you don't have the same preacher you have different preachers and this particular set up they were running five satellites like this and each one of these are big churches they run several thousand people but they but they the pastors in each of these five churches will come together and they will work out the sermon

together between them and then they will preach that sermon word for word and not only the sermon but the worship the whole service runs exactly the same and so at the exact moment and in fact on this video what they did was they cut from one church to the next and these churches were I suppose about 50 miles apart or so in in in an area and and and by satellite they would cut from one from the video from the one church to the next and it was almost seamless the same words were being spoken at exactly the same moment in every one of those every one of those churches this is called franchising this is the way the world operates but God doesn't operate that way God works with differences and even in the body of Christ he emphasizes not the fact that we're all the same but we're all

different even our fingers are different even our fingerprints are different our irises are different not not two people in the world have the same have the same iris in their in their eyes not two people in the world have the same fingerprints not two of us here look the same God makes us different God is a God of variety and of difference and so in dealing with the churches we want to put everything in a little box and God says no every church is different each church has got its own its own personality and so on all right let's go to Acts chapter 11 again the passage that we read and and I want you to see this in operation because this is not the first church that was established I don't think but certainly was one of the first churches that was established and certainly the first

church that was a Gentile church which was made up mainly of Greek or Gentiles rather than Jews and because of the dispersion that came as a result of Stephens stoning that says that they went to the people fled all over and they preached the gospel wherever they went they came to Antioch many people believed verse 21 verse 22 the news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch now the why I'm using this example is because people will refer to Jerusalem as the mother church and all of the churches were run from Jerusalem I want you to see this verse 23 when he came and had seen the grace of God so he's now Barnabas has now come to Antioch he was glad and encouraged them all with what purpose of heart they should continue with

the Lord he was a good man and so on then verse 25 Barnabas departed from Tarsus to seek Saul now that's important he doesn't go back to Jerusalem and say well this is what I found now what do I do next

he comes there he finds these believers preachers amongst them and then he says well I need to go and find Paul who's at this stage is still called Saul that Saul had not actually entered into the ministry yet verse 26 and when he found him he brought him to Antioch and so it was with a great for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch can you see that Jerusalem has nothing to do with us except that they sent Barnabas out in the first instance Barnabas went out and he was on his own and he dealt

with the church of Antioch he said I need help he went to find Paul they continued to preach Jerusalem had nothing to do with it this was not a sister-daughter church or a satellite Church of Jerusalem and then later on in verse chapter 13 now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers Barnabas Simeon and so on they minister to the Lord verse 2 and verse 3 then having fasted and prayed they laid hands on them and they sent them away so this is the first missionaries that are sent out from Antioch again you don't see them going to Jerusalem and saying well you know we want to do some mission work you know let me say we'll send you money and you can send out missionaries they just sent the man out they didn't send them to Jerusalem to be qualified or to be to

be checked by Jerusalem when they saw the vision to do it they just so what I'm trying to show you is that they're not operating as a satellite or a branch or as a daughter of Jerusalem they're operating as an independent church just making their own decisions the decisions that they believe to be right before the Lord and and so and if ever there was a situation where you would have this kind of satellite situation or or branch or daughter church to a mother church it would be here because Jerusalem was where it was all happening and and Barnabas had come from there but in fact it Jerusalem was not the mother church Jerusalem was just another church happened to be the first church happened to be the church where the twelve apostles were but it was not the mother church now it's also

interesting that it was not long after this in 70 AD that in fact Jerusalem was destroyed now we know much about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD but we forget that together with the city the church was also destroyed and you wonder why that happened who brought about the destruction of Jerusalem it was God of course he used the Romans but this was prophesied and it was in the plan of God God destroyed Jerusalem because he was dealing with Israel but I think it's also significant that he destroyed the church along with the city you say how could God destroy the church I believe that God destroyed the church because he did not want Jerusalem to rise up and become the Rome of today to become the mother church the central church and so there was no church in Jerusalem after 70 AD

there was no place that they could say well let's let's take a pilgrimage to the mother church there was no such thing because Jerusalem had been destroyed and so obviously we know that there were some believers later on again and in fact this was not the first time that the church had been destroyed because remember at the stoning of Stephen the church already had been dispersed and only the twelve apostles remained but obviously more more people got saved after that all right so we can go through many many other examples we've going to run out of time but you can see from the scripture that there is there is no such thing as a central church central authority a head office a headquarters each church stands with its own elders under the headship of Jesus Christ when we go through the

writings of Paul Paul makes no reference to any kind of authority outside of the local church except Jesus Christ this is throughout Paul's teachings and of course in the question is where do people get this from I don't have a clue I know some of the scriptures they like to use to pervert to teach denominationalism there is just not you know it's just not in the Bible it's just not what the Bible teaches all right let's look at

Corinth and I'm going to go through this very very quickly and if you look at Paul's dealing with a city with a church in Corinth which was a church that had many problems and and whenever and the role of denominations and of headquarters and of central authorities invariably comes into play when a church has problems when everything is going well all they want is

your tithes or a portion of the churches in of the local churches income but the time when they flex their muscles is when their problems in the local churches now there's a problem in the church of Corinth and I want you to see how Paul deals with it he deals with the issue of excommunication one of the most severe forms of discipline but he does not excommunicate who excommunicates the local church he says you guys put the man out that's what you have to do Paul doesn't do it 1 Corinthians chapter 5 disputes among believers have to be resolved in the local assembly 1 Corinthians chapter 6 we spoke about that on Wednesday night he doesn't say if there's a dispute amongst local believers go to a magistrate in fact he says don't go to the to the local judge but he also doesn't establish

some kind of church rule and say well you know could take it to the district council or the regional overseer or whatever you like no he says if you've got a dispute with your brother you take it to the church again the final authority in even in disputes of a legal nature is in the local church it's not beyond the local church the appointment of delegates to carry funds from the church was local 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 19 now let me just touch on that because on two occasions money is sent from the local churches to Jerusalem and people like to use that and say well you see we have to send money to the headquarters but at no stage was that in the sense of money being sent to a headquarter it was simply there was a famine there was a need in Jerusalem and they sent that money to

another church who's in need that's all there is to it there is no more deeper meaning to that and if that other church happened to be in Galatia or happened to be in in in Macedonia or wherever it would have been exactly the same and it just happened to be Jerusalem there is no sense of sending a tithe or a portion of the church's income to the mother church it was to a church that was in need that was that was the only reason why they sent the money to Jerusalem letters of commendation are given by the local church now the letters of commendation was that when you move from one church to another one city to another when you arrived at the next city they needed to know who you were because remember these were dangerous times there were spies from the government who were looking for and

spies from the Jews who were looking for people that they could persecute and people would come in and say well I'm a brother you know I come from I come from South Africa I'm a brother and you know I'm one of you but meantime I'm working for the for the government and so or I'm working for the devil which is very likely also and so when they went from one church to the other they would take with them a letter from the previous church letters of commendation saying this is a brother who is fellowship with us for so many years and we have confidence in him that he is a good brother and that you know that you can trust him and that sort of thing this is the letters of commendation again the letters of commendation are sent by the Church of Corinth they are not sent by the headquarters or by

some other kind of authority and then ministry to the poor saints from the local churches their decisions are made at the local level they're made by the Church of Corinth they are not made Jerusalem doesn't say you know we got a problem you guys better send us 20 20 percent of your income or we need \$5,000 to fix our our sprinkler system no the decision is made by the local church what they were going to do how much they were going to do Paul says this is what you need to do this is good if you would if you did that but he doesn't tell them what to do he tells them their principles it's good that you communicate that you

share with others who are in need all right and now have less than five minutes to do the other half the benefits of autonomy there are benefits and I'm going to go

through this very very quickly it protects against Empire builders many denominations are built because somebody has some great lust for power and when churches are autonomous those men are stripped of their power and it doesn't mean that the local church still cannot be abused by men who are authoritarian and ungodly unfortunately that happens but their power and their damage is limited to one church only not to whole denominations and I can tell you many histories you need to learn church history to see the damage that one man can do when he gets power over a hundred or five hundred or a thousand or twenty thousand churches it protects against sectarianism sectarianism meaning I'm of Paul and and we're the first church of the communion of Burbank community or whatever name you like and

we're not with those guys because we have a different name the word denomination simply means a name it is we speak about money of different denominations you have different denominations you have ten dollars and twenty dollars and hundred dollars and denominations just means a name a label and labels divide why do people want to know what denomination are you simply because if you're of my denomination well that's wonderful brother we can have fellowship but if your label is different to my label we can't have fellowship and and when we have that sort of thing it causes division now one of the things that we have a privilege I believe unfortunately doesn't always work in our favor but is that we we are non-denominational we should be able to have fellowship with anybody who loves Jesus

but unfortunately the world has become so conditioned and so sectarian that if you don't have my label it doesn't matter even if you don't have a label I still kind of have fellowship with you now that's sad and so and so the whole issue of of autonomy of local churches means that we should in fact be open more open to have fellowship rather than have these artificial fences that are set up by the by the and then of course some denominations are very strict about those kinds of offenses and we come out of a denomination where we were not you were formally forbidden to have fellowship with people outside of that denomination very very sad it protects against heresy nothing stops me or anybody from in a local church from bringing heresy to that local church and the church buying into it

unfortunately except the Lord's protection but when churches are autonomous the damage is limited again to the local church the heresy can't spread across 10 or 50 or a hundred churches is one of the reasons why God designed the thing to work this way and so when Roth sets into one particular church it's it's limited to that church and it doesn't spread across the denomination but unfortunately today and I I think I made reference to to one of the big denominations in this church where I observed 5,000 pastors in a conference in Nashville Tennessee buy into some of the most grievous error of today and it was just sold to the whole denomination in one go one conference everybody bought into it now if there was not that denomination it would have taken years even with our modern

communication methods for that error to have actually crept into and gone into each one of those 5,000 churches or 5,000 pastors but it because it's a denomination everybody buys into the same area in one go and so being autonomous protects against heresy being autonomous means we have to depend on Christ when we're part of a denomination well we need to fix our sprinkler system so we write a letter to headquarters and we say well you know we have a problem we have to fix the sprinkler system we need five grand and they send us a check and we're indebted to them because don't forget the golden rule he holds the gold rules he holds the gold rules and so the moment that we're indebted to the headquarters they call the shots now I would love to be able to write a letter off to the district

supervisor whatever and say brother you know please help us we need five grand whatever it is but we don't have such a thing but we have the Lord Jesus Christ and so being autonomous means we have to depend on Jesus Christ and I would rather depend on Jesus then depend on a denomination or depend on somebody some man or some organization outside it means when we have problems we have to resolve those problems amongst ourselves we can't call for some big shot to come and decree this or that or the other thing which means that we have to take responsibility for our church it means that every individual has to take responsibility for the church because this is our church this is not the denomination's church this is not some other organization's church this is our church and the buck stops

here the buck stops with every every individual here and so it results in the local church taking ownership and responsibility for the church in fact when I was in Michigan I preached in a in a church they had just taken over the bought this building I don't know what they paid for it but it was part of a denomination the church the building used to belong to a denomination that church started getting into trouble and they basically walked away they left the church with everything just like it's standing here with all of the equipment where the computers are in the office everything just like that because the people said it's not my problem it's the denomination's problem and they walked out just like that they had no sense of ownership and so we can't do that here because this this is

this is the church this is our church and so it builds ownership and responsibility it protects against hostile governments now this may not be a big issue here today it will become an issue in China the church that survived in China where the churches that were not denominational because those that were denominations when Mao Zedong took over the government he immediately called the heads of the of the denominations and he took control of those churches but the churches that were independent and autonomous churches here and there he couldn't touch them and that story has gone over and over the same thing happened in in in the Congo the same thing happened in India the same thing has happened over and over and over and over and so it protects against interference and the and and and and

the and a takeover and control by a hostile government and you say well this government is not hostile it may not be hostile right now but already in Canada a pastor has been locked up and I think he is still in prison for preaching against homosexuality for basically preaching the Word of God and and so we're not living in a friendly world we're not living in a world that loves Christians and it's becoming more and more anti-christian and so that that is one of the reasons that autonomy builds non-dependence on missionary organizations and I can't go into be we've lost time but again many churches missionaries people or churches send out missionaries to other areas and those churches become into become dependent on the missionaries and on the sending organization when the sending

organization can no longer send missionaries or the money dries up or the political environment changes so that the missionary can has to be withdrawn those churches collapse because they're independent dependent on on them on the mother church many of the churches in Nigeria are dependent on the churches in America what we are trying to teach those those that we are working with is that those churches have to be autonomous they cannot look to us for money or even for ministry we will help them and support them as much as we can but they have to be independent because when something happens that closes the doors and Nigeria could very well close down because it from from a Christian point of view because it is it is rapidly becoming a Muslim country and it is dominated by Muslims in the

government and when they close the doors for missionaries like ourselves to go there and preach the gospel those men that we have taught by the grace of God will continue to be able to continue the work

whereas if we're building a central organization the whole thing will fall apart all right I think I need to draw a line there I have a few more points but the tapes run out

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