

A – (The) Autonomy of the local church

Philippians 1:1 PAUL (Παῦλος) and Timotheus (Τιμόθεος), the servants (δοῦλοι Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ) of Jesus Christ, to all the saints (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi (τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις), with (σὺν) the bishops (ἐπισκόποις) and deacons (διακόνους):

Philippians 1:1 PAUL and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Autonomy of the local church is in one sense very simple!

αὐτός = self

νόμος = law / rule

The simple concept is self-rule!

The local church rules / governs **itself!**

- **Self-governing**
- **Self-supporting**
- **Self-propagating**

It is also important to understand what this **doesn't** mean:

- This doesn't mean independent / independence
- This doesn't mean that no one can tell the local church (= the Baptist Dictator) what to do!!!
- This is not a pure, radical democracy!

We e votes → everyone has the same right to speak / be heard

We w opinions (in the process) → not everyone has the **same** right to be heard!

- This does not mean deacon rule! And **even worse**, this does not mean that a secondary or tertiary board runs things (trustees, board of directors)
- This obviously does not mean that the wealthiest man &/ key family runs the church.
- This certainly does not mean a local church cannot be part of a voluntary association – of churches, missions agency, Bible college, Bible Translation ministry...

Regional church groupings seems to be **common** in the NT:

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order **to the churches of Galatia**, even so do ye. **1 Corinthians 16:2** Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

Revelation 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

Revelation 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it **unto the seven churches which are in Asia**; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Revelation 1:19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; **Revelation 1:20** The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.**

1 Peter 1:1 PETER, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

2 Corinthians 1:1 PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:**

2 Corinthians 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on **the churches of Macedonia;**

How is this done? What does this look like?

1. The local church is self-governing under the headship of Christ!

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, **even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Ephesians 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ**, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

Ephesians 1:22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, **Ephesians 1:23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.**

Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, **which is the head, even Christ:**

Colossians 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

2. The local church is self-governing upon &/ from the authority of the NT – the teaching of the apostles.

Philippians 1:1 PAUL and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Acts 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in **the apostles' doctrine** and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon **the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being **the chief corner stone;**

2 Peter 3:1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

2 Peter 3:2 That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

Jude 17 But, beloved, remember ye **the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;**

1 Corinthians 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, **with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:**

1 Corinthians 4:17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, **who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.**

1 Corinthians 7:17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. **And so ordain I in all churches.**

1 Corinthians 11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, **neither the churches of God.**

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, **as in all churches of the saints.**

1 Corinthians 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. **1 Corinthians 14:35** And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. **1 Corinthians 14:36** What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? **1 Corinthians 14:37** If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. **1 Corinthians 14:38** But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. **1 Corinthians 14:39** Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. **1 Corinthians 14:40** Let all things be done decently and in order.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, **as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.**

1 Corinthians 16:2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

2 Corinthians 1:1 PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:**

Some people fear autonomy. I get it! They falsely believe it will tend to chaos! Maybe they have experienced this in churches.

Maybe they feel a “Bishop / dictator” will be safer. Or, maybe a group of elders / deacons. Or, maybe oversight from some denomination will protect things. I **understand** fully!

Under Christ – the one to whom we must give an account...**and upon** the absolute authority of Scripture...

3. The Local Church is self-governing with the leadership of the pastors / elders / overseers and the service of the deacons!

Philippians 1:1 PAUL and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, **to** all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons:**

The pastors lead by their preaching, teaching, example, and office. The deacons implement the decisions of the pastors and congregations.

The church that functions best obviously works together.

The church cannot delegate the decision-making...to anyone else!

The church can (and must) delegate the implementation of their decisions.

4. The Local Church is self-governing by the congregation’s decisions and votes (deciding & voting).

Philippians 1:1 PAUL and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, **to** all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Where and how do the members govern?

A. By sending missionaries

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **Acts 13:2** **As they ministered** (Λειτουργούντων) to the Lord, and fasted (νηστεύοντων), the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. **Acts 13:3** And when they had fasted (νηστεύσαντες) and prayed (προσευξάμενοι), and laid (ἐπιθέντες) their hands on them, they sent them away. **Acts 13:4** So they, being sent forth **by the Holy Ghost** (ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου), **departed** unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

Acts 14:26 And thence sailed **to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.** **Acts 14:27** And when they were come, and **had gathered the church together** (καὶ συναγαγόντες τὴν ἐκκλησίαν), they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. **Acts 14:28** And there they abode long time **with the disciples.**

B. By choosing pastors and deacons

Acts 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, **Acts 14:22** **Confirming** (ἐπιστηρίζοντες) the souls of the disciples, and **exhorting** (παρακαλοῦντες) them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. **Acts 14:23** And when **they had ordained** (Χειροτονήσαντες) them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

[2 Corinthians 8:19 And not that only, but who was also **chosen** (χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν) **of the churches** to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind:]

Titus 1:5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain (**Titus 1:5** Τοῦτου χάριν κατέλιπόν σε ἐν Κρήτῃ, ἵνα τὰ λείποντα ἐπιδιορθώσῃ, καὶ καταστήσῃς κατὰ πόλιν πρεσβυτέρους, ὡς ἐγὼ σοι διαταξάμην·) elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

1 Timothy 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. **1 Timothy 3:2** **A bishop then must be** blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; **1 Timothy 3:3** Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; **1 Timothy 3:4** One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; **1 Timothy 3:5** (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) **1 Timothy 3:6** Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of

the devil. **1 Timothy 3:7** Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

1 Timothy 3:8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; **1 Timothy 3:9** Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. **1 Timothy 3:10** And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. **1 Timothy 3:11** Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. **1 Timothy 3:12** Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **1 Timothy 3:13** For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

This, of course, doesn't mean missionaries &/ pastors would not have input! Plus both pastors and deacons have a vote – since they are a member of the church!

Acts 6:1 And in those days, **when** the number of the disciples was multiplied, **there arose a murmuring of the Grecians (τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν) against the Hebrews (τοὺς Ἑβραίους)**, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

[Ἑλληνιστῆς not Ἕλληνας, ἦνος]

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, **It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve (διακονεῖν) tables.** **Acts 6:3** Wherefore, brethren, **look ye out (Ἐπισκέψασθε)** among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint **over this business (ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης).** **Acts 6:4** **But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry (τῆ διακονία τοῦ λόγου) of the word.** **Acts 6:5** And the saying pleased the whole multitude: **and they chose (ἐξελέξαντο)** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: **Acts 6:6** **Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.** **Acts 6:7** And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

C. By controlling its own finances

Acts 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; **Acts 2:45** And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Acts 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. **Acts 11:28** And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. **Acts 11:29** **Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Acts 11:30** Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. **1 Corinthians 16:2** Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, **that there be no gatherings when I come.** **1 Corinthians 16:3** And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. **1 Corinthians 16:4** And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

2 Corinthians 8:18 And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; **2 Corinthians 8:19** And not that only, but who was also **chosen (χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν) of the churches** to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: **2 Corinthians 8:20** Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: **2 Corinthians 8:21** Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. **2 Corinthians 8:22** And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you. **2 Corinthians 8:23** Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ. **2 Corinthians 8:24** Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.

D. By determining and disciplining its own members

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day **there were added unto them** about three thousand souls. **Acts 2:47** Praising God, and having favour with all the people. **And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.**

Acts 4:4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and **the number** of the men was about five thousand.

Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples **was multiplied**, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. **Acts 6:7** And the word of God increased; and **the number** of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Matthew 18:15 Moreover **if** thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: **if** he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. **Matthew 18:16** But **if** he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. **Matthew 18:17** And **if** he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: **but if** he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. **1 Corinthians 5:2** And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. **1 Corinthians 5:3** For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, **1 Corinthians 5:4** In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, **1 Corinthians 5:5** To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. **1 Corinthians 5:6** **Your glorying is not good.** Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? **1 Corinthians 5:7** **Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.** For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: **1 Corinthians 5:8** Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle **not** to company with fornicators: **1 Corinthians 5:10** **Yet not altogether** with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; **for then** must ye needs go out of the world. **1 Corinthians 5:11** But **now** I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

1 Corinthians 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? **1 Corinthians 5:13** But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

E. By solving and settling its own problems

1 Corinthians 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? **1 Corinthians 6:2** Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? **1 Corinthians 6:3** Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? **1 Corinthians 6:4** If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. **1 Corinthians 6:5** I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? **1 Corinthians 6:6** But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. **1 Corinthians 6:7** Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? **1 Corinthians 6:8** Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.

Matthew 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. **Matthew 18:16** But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. **Matthew 18:17** And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

F. By celebrating the ordinances

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. **Acts 2:42** And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, **and in breaking of bread**, and in prayers.

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: **1 Corinthians 11:24** And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. **1 Corinthians 11:25** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. **1 Corinthians 11:26** For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.