

THE NEED FOR A MOTHER CHURCH

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"We will consider this topic in four sections with the following titles: A Church Enclosed, A Church Fragmented, A Church Estranged, A Church Extended.

A CHURCH ENCLOSED

"A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse" (S. of S. 4:12)

The Lord's church is a distinct and separate organization from any other on the earth. The local church is not simply a fraction or a part of a larger and similar organization. She is loved by God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. God purchased the church (local concept) with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Jesus Christ delegated authority to his church (Matt. 28:18-20). The Holy Spirit approved the church (local concept) on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1-3).

As we think of the church's being a distinct organization unlike any other in the world, let us consider briefly her authority by example.

Example #1: In Acts chapter 6 we read of a problem arising in the church regarding the "daily ministrations." The problem was solved by a general agreement [today we think of that as a church vote] wherein they chose seven men to take care of the "daily ministrations." The church exercised her distinct authority in doing this. Being members of this church, they voted in agreement to select these seven men.

Proposition #1: What if ten of the members of this church met somewhere away from the regular meeting place and voted to do something about the problem of the "daily ministrations"? Would their agreement together or their vote determine what was or what was not to be done in regard to this "daily ministrations"? The answer is no.

Example #2: In Acts chapter 15 we read of the disagreement that came to the churches over circumcision and the Mosaic Law. When the meeting took place, an agreement was made that is recorded in verse 20. In verse 22 we find that it pleased the apostles, the elders, with the whole church.

Proposition #2: If there were some in the church who met on their own and came to some conclusions concerning circumcision, would it have any validity in the "inclosed" church? The answer is no. In fact, the sect of the Pharisees (verse 5) did just that; but when it was considered in the context of the church, their decision was refused. Notice also that the persuasion of the "sect" was not even considered by the local church until their influence had caused confusion within the local church.

So, in saying that the church is "inclosed" this writer is advocating that each church of the Lord Jesus is completely independent of all other organizations and that no decisions pertaining to the work of God through the churches can be made outside this local establishment.

Keep this in mind as we consider the next point, which naturally follows.

A CHURCH FRAGMENTED

"That there should be no schism" (I Cor. 12:25)

This very sect mentioned under our first point (the sect of the Pharisees, Acts 15:5) shows their true form in this chapter. First, we must notice that they were believers. These were not lost sinners who were trying to penetrate the church, but this "sect" formed right within the church itself.

They had formed their own clique and had formed their own sub-theology. They were not teaching works for salvation; they were simply putting the burden of the Law on Christian believers.

The most important aspect of this example, though, is that this sub-set of believers had separated themselves from the church and had taken authority upon themselves to carry on the business of the Lord's church. Acts 15:24 tells us that they "went out from us." This is the perfect example of a small group of believers in a particular church who decide arbitrarily to meet in a different location and appoint themselves to be a body and take upon themselves the authority to select a pastor and deacons and to serve the ordinances; namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

This is done on a regular and ongoing basis in Baptist churches around the country. What is wrong with this? Let us consider it by example.

Example: Bro. and Mrs. Swakley are saved through the ministry of the Shawnee Baptist Church. They both submit themselves to baptism under the authority of this church. After baptism, they are members in good standing with the privilege of participating in various aspects of that church's ministries and activities. They may now vote on issues brought up by that church. They may be served the Lord's Supper by that church and may partake of the same on a regular basis as long as they are members in good standing. They may NOT, however, make personal and private decisions for the church. Whatever decisions are made come before the church for discussion and consideration and are voted upon by the entire membership before any actions are taken.

Now, let us say, that Bro. Swakley moves to a different city and cannot find a Bible-teaching church to attend; so he decides (on his own) that he will get a few believers together and start meeting for prayer and fellowship. After some time and consideration, Bro. and Mrs. Swakley decide that they may as well have a church in that community; so they take the following action:

A preacher called to come to preach to them on a regular basis. The preacher preaches for awhile and someone is saved. They determine that the new believer must be baptized, so they decide that the preacher is to do the baptizing. The new convert is immersed in water just the way they used to do at the previous church. Now he is a member of this "church".

At this stage of the drama most people would automatically and without question call this group of people a church. But if we follow through with this example logically, we find that some problems arise. Following are some statements and questions that will, I hope, show the problems.

1. To what church did this couple belong when they were first saved and baptized? Shawnee Baptist Church.

2. By what authority did they perform their privileges in that local church? Local church authority.

3. When they moved away from the community of the Shawnee Baptist Church, where was their membership? It remained at the Shawnee Baptist Church.

4. Was there anything wrong with meeting with other believers for prayer and fellowship? Absolutely not!

5. Was it wrong for them to call for a preacher to come and preach to them? Not per se! But a mental attitude is being formed at this time, an attitude of worshipping and functioning as a church.

6. What is now the status of the Swakley's membership at Shawnee Baptist Church? By continuing to be members they remain obligated to the church and are under its authority. Distance does not change that. Names are not removed simply because people move to a different place except for nonattendance, which is done because of lack of faithfulness to the church. That is no way to have your name removed from a church roll.

7. Were they wrong for having the new convert baptized? Yes. Having their membership back at Shawnee Baptist, they usurped the authority of Shawnee Baptist Church by asking for the baptism of a new convert on their own.

If they had lived around the corner from the meeting place of Shawnee Baptist Church, would they have taken the same authority upon themselves? Then what makes it all right to do at a distance? Distance does not change authority.

Do you see what is happening? The same thing that happened in Acts chapter 15. A new "sect" is being organized and is going out "from us."

8. Upon baptizing the new convert the authority for baptism was changed from the church to an individual or a fragment. Making this decision to baptize, whether it be made by one person or a few, is usurping the authority of the church; because it becomes an arbitrary decision. Now, does the authority for baptism, then, lie in the preacher? Some would say that it does; but if you will notice the above example, the authority is actually wielded by Mr. and Mrs. Swakley.

Mr. & Mrs. Swakley have now decided to vote without consent of the church to which they belong. Remember, distance makes no difference in authority. Mr. and Mrs. Swakley have now fragmented the Shawnee Baptist Church by separating to themselves and claiming authority which they do not have. This is no different from ten of the men of a church meeting outside of the building in the parking lot and making decisions for the church. These ten men have no business deciding who will or will not be baptized, because if their discussion determines that Mr. Back be baptized, they must first bring it up before the church before Mr. Back can be baptized. This is church authority.

If these same ten men decided to carry on church business by themselves and simply stay away from the Shawnee Baptist Church, they are still wrong in these ways.

1. They are wrong for not attending their church (Heb. 10:25).
2. They are wrong for not giving to their church (I Cor. 16:1).
3. They are wrong for not visiting for their church (2 Cor. 5:20).

You may ask why they cannot simply ask for their names to be removed from the church roll of Shawnee Baptist Church. That can be done, but that is a negative aspect. That is like saying that you no longer agree with the theology or the program of the church and do not want to be like them or a part of them.

Not only that, but if your name is removed from a roll by request, you are still submitting to the authority of the church and are considered a disciplined member.

Too, if your name were removed from Shawnee Baptist Church by request, to what church would you belong? If you say none, then how do you become a member of another church?

In our example, the person simply places himself in the new church, and others are added according to his agreement; therefore, the first person to begin the work becomes the authority for all the actions of the church. The authority rests completely upon that one person.

You do not become a member of any local church simply by declaring that you are such. We have many people in the Harrison area who claim to be members of First Baptist Church but are not.

So we see how innocently that a church can be fragmented. Christ is against a church schism, and

this is what develops under the example given.

A "CHURCH" ESTRANGED

"Certain which went out from us" (Acts 15:24)

When the foregoing example has been developed completely, we find a fine-looking building sitting on the corner of some city somewhere having people attend regularly and being baptized regularly and functioning in the same manner as the Shawnee Baptist Church before mentioned.

But remember that the authority for all this church business comes from one person, the person who got the ball rolling. They will tell you perhaps that the preacher has the authority to baptize, but you tell me who asked the preacher to come and do the baptizing and I will tell you that it was Mr. and/or Mrs. Swakley. So the authority for baptism, church business, the Lord's Supper, church discipline, etc. came from the Swakleys.

This church, instead of being just another Baptist church on another corner in another city is an estranged church, not a true church at all. At what time did the Shawnee Baptist Church vote to give the Swakleys (members of Shawnee) permission to meet together and carry on business as a church? At no time. They assumed it. They claimed it. Yea, they usurped the authority of their own church, betrayed that church, and estranged themselves from that church just as the "sect" in Acts chapter 15 did.

A CHURCH EXTENDED

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19)

The Bible offers a proper way for extending the church of the Lord Jesus Christ to spread throughout the world with her influence and her Gospel. This in modern times is called the "mother church" method. You will not find this phrase in the Scriptures, but the principle is definitely presented by example especially in the book of Acts.

Institutional Authority - A Biblical Principle

Please refer to Deuteronomy chapter 12. This chapter shows an ancient principle that was practiced by Israel from the commandment of God. Notice especially these verses:

Verse 5: But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come.

Verse 8: Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is

right in his own eyes.

Verse 13: Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest.

This same authority is found in the New Testament beginning with the preaching of John the Baptist and continuing throughout what is commonly called the church age. John was a man "sent from God" (John 1:33). John did not just begin a ministry of his own, but he had God's direct authority.

This authority continues to our present age. The authority of John was given to the church by Christ in Matt. 28:18-20:

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Jesus And The Apostles Had John's Baptism

Neither Jesus nor any of the apostles did anything regarding the church until they were baptized by John, so John's baptism carried a very powerful authority. Even the Pharisees demanded to know by what authority Christ did the things that he did (See Matt. 21:23). Jesus answered the Pharisees with a question: The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? (Matt. 21:25). The Pharisees could not tell Jesus from where the authority of John came. That is because they refused to recognize Heaven's authority (See Luke 7:29-30).

From One Church To Another: The Biblical Pattern

The church at Jerusalem was the first church in existence. When it was found that there were believers in Samaria through Philip's preaching, the church at Jerusalem sent Peter and John; and they laid their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the demonstration of the Holy Spirit [authority] just as the believers in Jerusalem had received. This receiving of the Holy Spirit was God's institutional sanction. This was necessary because the Samaritans thought that God's authority was already upon them (See John 4:20).

When Saul of Tarsus was saved he was taken to Damascus. [See Acts 9:1-19] A man by the name of Ananias, who evidently was affiliated with the church at Jerusalem (see verse 13), [2] was sent (verse 17) to Saul that he might pray for him and that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. So, even Paul's ministry was sanctioned by the church at Jerusalem. He was not an authority of himself.

When Paul and Silas were to begin their first missionary journey, they were sent out by the church at Antioch; and when they returned from their missionary journey, they reported to the church at Antioch. That is because they were not a ministry unto themselves, but their ministry was through the local church. Paul teaches us in Eph. 3:21 that God receives glory only through the church.

So down through the ages a continual line of authoritative baptisms has existed even unto our day.

If a person, then, begins a ministry without the express authority of an existing church of the Lord Jesus Christ, then he is a ministry to himself and has divided the church of the Lord and caused a schism, which the Lord hates. He has become a "denomination" of his own, and his ministry is not approved of God. He has taken authority unto himself despite the pattern that God has laid down in Scripture over and over.

May God bless us as we spread the Gospel by way of the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. He promised that no matter how long the world stands the gates of Hell will not prevail against the church of the Lord. So the authority of God continues throughout history from the time of Christ. Every spiritual worker should be very careful to be sure that this authority is taken with responsibility in order not to usurp the authority of Christ's churches. (Eph. 3:21)"

[1] Baptist elder Ronnie Wolfe graciously gave permission to include this excellent article as an appendix to this volume.

[2] Whether Ananias was a member of the Jerusalem church or the Damascus church is beside the point. The point is he was a member of a New Testament church and acted with church-authority. It seems likely that Ananias had previously been a member of the Jerusalem church and consequently heard of the outrages perpetrated by Saul against the Lord's church. It seems probable that at the time of Saul's conversion Ananias was a member of the Damascus church. That he was at this time resident in Damascus is clear. It would seem that he took Saul to meet "with the disciples which were at Damascus," for we find Saul assembling with them (Acts 9:19). Obviously Ananias had authority since he not only put his hands on Saul with the result that Saul received the Holy Ghost, but Ananias also baptized him. Some think he was one of the seventy disciples. Extra-biblical writers say he was pastor of the Damascus church. This seems highly probable, but is not absolutely known [C.A.P.].

Remarks on the Use of the Term "Mother Church"

by Curtis Pugh

Some Brethren object to the use of the term "Mother Church." While they are correct in their point that the term is not used in Scripture, neither are such words as "the rapture," "gambling," "rape," etc., but the concepts are dealt with nevertheless. Many scholars, including non-Baptist R.C.H. Lenski, have maintained that John addressed the letter we call 2 John to a church under the simile of an "elect lady" with "children" (v. 1). ("Lady" is nowhere used of a woman in the Bible, unless here). This "elect lady" had an "elect sister" who also had "children" (v. 13). If this view is correct, there can be no argument as to the propriety of the term "mother church."

Furthermore, the false church-system is given the name "Mother of Harlots." While we would disassociate ourselves completely from her, nevertheless, the concept of motherhood in relation to churches, although false ones, is set forth clearly in this instance. It seems clear that the concept of each church being or having the capability of being a "mother" is Biblical even if the term itself is not used. The reader will note that churches are likened to a "bride." Certainly the Biblical pattern is that no church was ever established without previous "church connection" or authority from an already existing church - a "mother church."