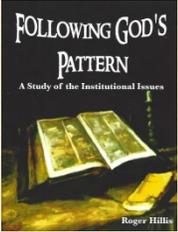


Lesson 9

Local Church Autonomy

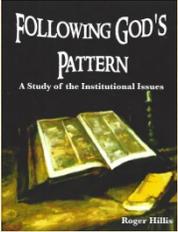


Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Introduction

Why study this topic?

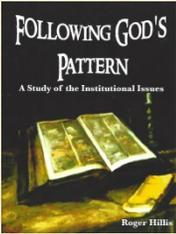
1. The *autonomy* of the local church is one of God's *safeguards*.
2. God has given this to His people to *prevent* us from *digressing* into apostasy.
3. An **understanding** of this topic is *essential* to keeping the local church *pure*.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

What is Autonomy?

1. Simply, it is **self-rule**, independence or self-government.
2. The **scriptural** plan is that **each congregation** has its own biblically prescribed government.
3. Under this plan, **no outside pressure** is exerted on the **decisions** made by the **leadership** of **each** church.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

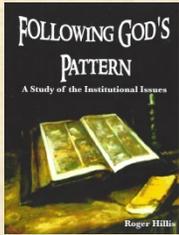
What is Autonomy?

4. Each local church is subject to only one higher authority, **Jesus Christ Himself.**
5. He is the head of the church and the only One who can tell the church what to do.

[Matt 28:18](#)

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ***“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”***”

6. There is but one level of authority above a congregation, the **Head, Jesus Christ.**
7. There is **not a head** in heaven and a **head on earth.**



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

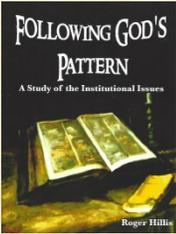
The Local church

1. The **local church** (congregation) is the **only functioning** organization of the Lord's people.

[Phil 1:1](#)

*“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the
bishops and deacons” NKJV*

2. The **Bishops** (called elders) are the **spiritual leaders**.
3. The **Deacons** are **servants** meeting the needs of the local church at the direction of the **elders**.
4. The **Saints** are the **Christians or disciples** of the local congregation.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Limits to Elders' Authority

1. According to God's word, an **eldership** only has the **authority** to oversee **one congregation** - and never more than one.

2. Here is **Peter's statement:**

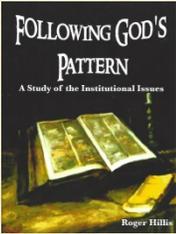
1 Peter 5:2-3

2 "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;" 3 "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;"

NKJV

3. Key phrase = **among you**

4. The **authority** of the elders is thus limited.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

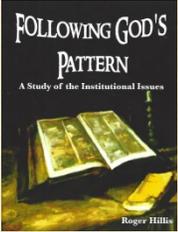
Limits to Elders' Authority

1. Here is Paul's statement:

Acts 20:28

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”. NKJV

2. This was a **different** eldership (Ephesian elders)
3. This is a **different** NT writer
4. What's the point?
5. Holy Spirit ***consistency!!***



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Limits to Elders' Authority

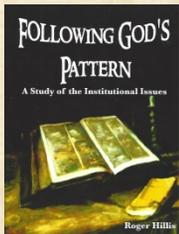
1. Here is another of Paul's statements:

[1 Thess 5:12-13](#)

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,

*13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of **their work**. Live in peace with one another. NAS*

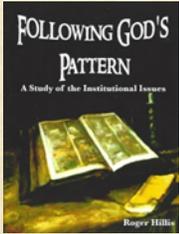
2. This passage was written to the **church**.
3. The previous passages were written to **elders**.
4. The ones to be **esteemed and highly appreciated** were those who **"labor among you"**.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Limits to Elders' Authority

1. The authority of elders is also **limited** in that they must rule **within** the parameters of **God's word**.
2. They must not **go beyond** what is **written** (1 Cor 4:6)
3. Elders do **exercise their authority** in the realm of **judgement decisions** that must be made in the local church.
4. They **do not have** law giving authority.
5. They must be content to **remain inside** the **doctrine of Christ**.
6. Like **any other saint**, if they **wander outside** of the NT, they "**do not have God**".



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

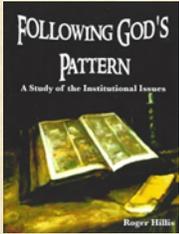
Limits to Elders' Authority

Areas of Judgement

Elders *Can* Decide:

- Who will be the **preacher**
- Who will hold **gospel meetings**
- What **time** services will be held
- When to **initiate** church discipline
- Who will be **used** in worship svcs
- Other areas of **personal** judgement

Someone must make such decisions and God has given that authority to the elders.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Limits to Elders' Authority

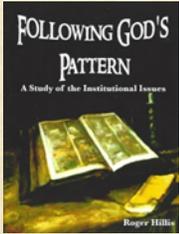
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Areas of Truth/Doctrine



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Limits to Elders' Authority

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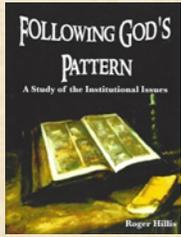
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Areas of Truth/Doctrine

No Authority to Decide:

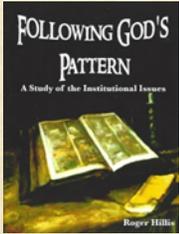
- The **frequency** of observing the Lord's supper
- Whether or not the church will use **instruments of music**
- If the church has a **gym** or **fellowship hall**
- Whether there will be **public prayers** in worship

These doctrinal decisions are a matter of revelation from God, not judgements in areas of opinion that do not matter.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Some Applications

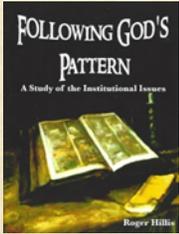


Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

Some Applications

Modern Denominationalism

- **Centralized** *power/authority*
- Developed *different* forms of church **government**
- Many *man-made* denominations
- Develops *its own* ideas
- Some *larger or smaller* than a local church
- **Separate** “Sunday School” with its own *officers, funds & work*
- *Established* regions, districts, synods, councils, **headquarters**
- *Dictates policy* to individual congregations



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

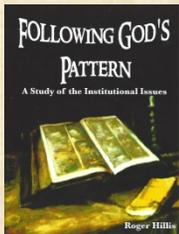
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Sponsoring Church Arrangement

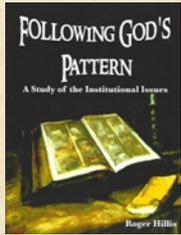
- Popular among *“institutional”* churches
- Man’s wisdom **negates** God’s congregational *autonomy* plan
- Many congregations *pool funds* to do a **bigger work** than any *one* local church can do
- **Smaller** churches *send money* to *one* big church; funds are placed under a “**sponsoring church eldership**” to disburse.
- The problem; a congregation *cannot take upon itself* a work it has *no ability* to support.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

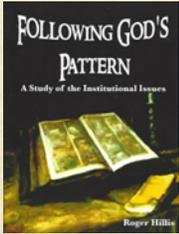
A Brotherhood Work?

1. It is **tempting** for brethren to want to do a **“great work”** for the brotherhood.
2. There is **no such thing** as a **“brotherhood work”**.
3. The Bible teaches **just one duty of a Christian** in relation to the brotherhood.
4. It is found in **1 Pet 2:17**. *“Honor all people. **Love the brotherhood**. Fear God. Honor the king”*
5. **That’s it!** Just love the brotherhood!
6. Some brethren fail to see the **clear distinction** between the church and its **local** and **universal** sense.



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

The Universal and Local Church



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

The Universal and Local Church

Church Universal

*Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22-23;
Eph 5:23-27; Heb 12:23*

There is only one

One is added to it (Acts 2:47)

Began on Pentecost (Acts 2)

Saint dies – still in it

No earthly organization

Cannot pool funds

Has no work

Church Local

*Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 1:2
Col 4:15-16; Rev 2 & 3*

There are many

One must join (Acts 9:26)

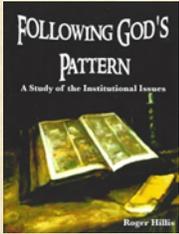
May begin at any time

Saint dies – no longer a part

Earthly organization (Phil 1:1)

Must pool funds (1 Cor 16;1-2)

Has work to do



Lesson 9 - Local Church Autonomy

The Universal and Local Church

1. The NT scriptures are *completely silent* as to any **universal function** of the church.
2. Since God has given the church only a *local organization, the congregation*, He intended for its function and work to be executed through the *local church only*.
3. The local church *does not have to answer to anyone* except the Lord.
4. If we attempt to do differently, we become *disobedient and irreverent*.

Lesson 9 - Question 3

1 Peter 5:2

*2 shepherd the flock of God **among you**, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;*

Acts 20:28

*28 "Be on guard for yourselves and **for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

1 Thess 5:12

*12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently **labor among you, and have charge over you** in the Lord and give you instruction, NAS*

Lesson 9 - Question 6

1 Peter 5:2

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1 Thess 5:12

*12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently **labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,** NAS*

Lesson 9 - Question 8

1 Peter 2:17

*17 Honor all men; **love the brotherhood**, fear God,
honor the king. NAS*