



FUNCTIONS AND MALFUNCTIONS OF
CHURCH AUTONOMY



WHAT IS CHURCH AUTONOMY?

The Church – Universal (**Acts 2:47**) and Local (**Romans 16:16**)

Church Organization is On the Local Level

- Only universal organization – **Ephesians 1:22-23** – Christ as head of the church.
- Only organization of the church on earth is local – **Philippians 1:1**





WHAT IS CHURCH AUTONOMY?

Autonomy is Local Church Self-Government

- **Autonomy** – from *autos* ‘self’ + *nomos* ‘law’ – the right or condition of self-government (New Oxford American Dictionary)
- Leadership – **Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:17, 28** – elders have rule in flock among them.





WHAT IS CHURCH AUTONOMY?

Autonomy is Local Church Self-Government

- Not self-government in the sense of entire freedom, but in exercise of submission to Christ – **1 Peter 5:4**
- Independent organization – **Philippians 1:1**
- Independent work – **Phil. 4:15-16** (evangelism); **1 Cor. 14:12** (edification); **1 Cor. 16:1-3** (benevolence)
- Coordinate with laws of liberty – **1 Cor. 10:23**





FUNCTIONS OF CHURCH AUTONOMY

Freedom to Follow Christ

- *Example* – **Acts 9:26-30** – the Jerusalem church made the decision to reject Saul, then to accept him. (**cf. 3 John 9-10**)

Prevention of Widespread Apostasy

- Warning of apostasy – **1 Timothy 4:1-6** – “*some will,*” not all.
- Letters to 7 churches in Asia demonstrate this – **Revelation 2-3**





FUNCTIONS OF CHURCH AUTONOMY

Glorifies Christ's Eternal Plan

- Christ's eternal plan concerned the church – **Ephesians 3:10-12, 20-21**
- Work of church performed on local level – **Acts 13:1-3** (evangelism); **Ephesians 4:16** (edification); **Romans 15:25-26** (benevolence)
- Each local church has same work (equality) – **1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:1**
- Each local church judged based on ability (independence) – **2 Corinthians 8:10-12**





FUNCTIONS OF CHURCH AUTONOMY

Glorifies Christ's Eternal Plan

- Any other pattern fails to bring glory to Christ's eternal plan!





MALFUNCTIONS OF CHURCH AUTONOMY

Deciding Doctrine and Practice

- The foundation is Christ and the apostles – **Ephesians 2:19-22; Colossians 2:6-7, 16-19**
- Autonomy does not speak to uniqueness in every way – **1 Corinthians 14:33, 36-38; 16:1**
- The Holy Spirit revealed will is binding on ALL congregations – **Acts 15:28-31; 16:4-5**





MALFUNCTIONS OF CHURCH AUTONOMY

Insulation from Criticism

- Does autonomy prohibit outside individual Christians or congregations from rebuking, admonishing, and attempting to correct the error of other Christians or congregations?
- Paul? – **Colossians 2:1-10; 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Cor. 11:12-15**
- John? – **2 John 9-11; 3 John 9-11**
- Barnabas? – **Acts 11:22-24**
- The proclamation of truth does not violate autonomy! – **2 Timothy 3:16-17**





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