

## Independency and Interdependency

(Message given by Malcolm H. Watts 02/12/19)



Acts 2 v.37-44.

### **The Church:**

Important distinctions are to be made:

The *Invisible* and *Visible* Church. By the *Invisible* Church is meant all the elect. The work of grace in their hearts is undiscernible to human eyes and is only seen and known to God (1 Sam. 16:7; Jer. 17:10; 2 Tim. 2:19). The *Visible* Church comprises those who profess the Faith and who are therefore easily identified and recognized (Acts 8:3; 12:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 10:23).

The *Jewish* and *Christian* Church. God has always had a Church in this world, a Church which is essentially one (Acts 7:38; 2 Cor. 6:16); but, in former times, it was predominantly Jewish, whereas now the Gentiles have been included within it (Matt. 28:19; Acts 15:14; Rom. 15:8-10; Eph. 3:6)

The *Militant* and *Triumphant* Church. On earth the Church is *Militant*, engaging with a hostile, unbelieving world; maintaining and defending the Faith once delivered; and contending for the crown-rights of Jesus Christ and His kingdom (Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Tim 6:12); but in heaven the Church is *Triumphant*, rejoicing in victory over evil and ceasing from all conflict (1 Cor. 15:51-57; Rev. 7:9-12; 14:13).

There is also what is called the *Universal* Church and the *Local* Church: the former being the whole company of God's believing people, in every age and in every place (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:10,21; 5:23-32), the latter being God's people who worship and serve together in a particular locality (Matt. 18:17; Acts 11:22; 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2).

This is the distinction that presently concerns us. It is one that is biblical and one that is recognized in various passages.

To cite one or two examples: In Psalm. 48:11, we read: "Let Mount Zion rejoice" - a reference to the *Universal* Church; and then we read: "Let the daughters of Judah be glad" - a reference to the *Local* Church (likened to the small cities of Judah).

Then again, in Isaiah 4:5. "Mount Zion" relates to the *Universal* Church and "every dwelling place of Mount Zion" and "her assemblies" relates to *Local* or *Particular* churches and their need for protection and provision.

And yet again, in Malachi 1:11, "My name shall be great among the Gentiles" describes the *Universal* Church, while "in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering" describes the *Local* Church, with an emphasis on the many and various assemblies of the Lord's people throughout the world, offering the incense of prayer (cf. Ps. 141:2) and the offering of praise (cf. Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5).

The apostle alludes to the *Universal* Church when he writes of Christian believers being "fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God ... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" and then proceeds to mention the *Local* Church there at Ephesus, writing, "In (Him) ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19, 20) *Local* Churches when he writes, "ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (2:23). See also: Hebrews 12:23, compared with Hebrews 10:25.

### **Independency:**

The local church, subject to Christ and His revealed will, is complete in itself, and subject to no *civil control* outside of itself (Jn. 15:19; 17:14; 18:36; 1 Jn. 5:19), nor to any external *ecclesiastical power*, whether diocesan bishops or higher church assemblies or judicatories (1 Cor. 5:12).

- Each local church is a 'church' in its own right (Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:16), with full power to order its worship and to govern itself according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 11:18-34; 5:1-13).
- Such churches have the power to receive or to reject members (Rom. 14:1ff.; 1 Cor. 5:1-3; 2 Cor. 2:6-10; 2 Thess. 3:6,14).

- They also have the right to elect their own church officers and to set apart men thus chosen to their particular services and works (Acts 6:1-7; 13:1-4; Phil. 1:1).
- The power is also theirs to meet for worship on the Lord's Day and to observe all the appointed ordinances (Acts: 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:1,2 14:23-25).
- It also belongs to them to take control of their own meetings (1 Cor. 14:23-40).
- The direction of collections and offerings and the regulation of the churches' financial affairs fall within the jurisdiction of each church (Acts 4:34,35; 5:1-11; 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:1-3).
- Each church is responsible for its own evangelism, ensuring that the Gospel is spread far and wide (Acts 13:1-4; 14:27; 1 Thess. 1:8).
- The local church must take care of all its members (1 Cor. 12:25; Gal. 5:13-15).
- Christ is the Head of His Body, the church, and the Body, each local church, is directly under His control (1 Cor. 12:13-27; Col. 1:18,19).
- The churches are responsible to Him and they will be considered accountable to Him (1 Cor. 5:4; Col. 2:19; Rev. 2:1,4; 3:1-3).

### ***Interdependency:***

Independency is not synonymous with Isolationism. Each local church has real relations to other local churches and each local church has important duties to perform to these other churches. Historically – and perhaps particularly in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – this has been recognized, and expressed in real, meaningful, and beneficial fellowship. This needs to be recovered in the further reformation of our churches. The idea is that local churches should feel bound to one another in faith and in love. There should be a God-given care among us, so that each church feels obliged to seek the welfare of other like-minded churches.

- The Lord's people do instinctively feel a blessed unity with other Christians in other churches (1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 4:16).
- A local church should both feel and evidence Christian love towards other like-minded churches, desiring their spiritual well-being (benevolence) and doing whatever is necessary to bring this about (beneficence) (Song of Sol. 8:8,9 – love for a sister-church; Rom. 16:23,24).
- Loving concern for other churches should find expression in prayers (Ps. 122:6; Eph. 6:18 – “supplication for all saints”).
- Each church should so conduct itself that it sets an example to other churches (1 Thess. 1:6,7; 2:11-14 cf. 1 Cor. 10:32).
- Churches can share the good things of God's Word and the ministry of His Word, by allowing their ministers to preach in other churches (Col. 4:16. 1 Cor. 3:22,23).
- Support can be given to special services, meetings and conferences elsewhere, encouraging those who arrange these events (cf. Rom. 1:10-12).
- When necessary, churches can warmly receive those who have belonged to other churches (Acts. 18:27; Rom. 16:1,2; 3 Jn. 5-8). They can also show support for one another's discipline, refusing to receive into fellowship those who have been removed from the membership of another church.
- If a church is in financial need, it would be good if other churches sent gifts for their relief and help (Acts 11:29; Rom. 15:26,27; 2 Cor. 8:1-4,19).
- Should problems arise in one church, representatives from other churches can meet in synod to give sound counsel (Acts 15:2,6, 25-31; 16:4,5).
- It could be that the minister of one church could take temporary oversight of another church as a moderator, giving teaching and guidance to that church (Acts 11:22-26 – the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to help the believers there).

### ***What else can we do?***

If there is no gospel in an area, we can give help and support believers trying to establish a church there. If a church wants to call a Pastor but cannot afford to do so, then we should do our best to assist them. It may be a matter of giving advice or time to help a church in some practical way.

After all, we have been redeemed by the same Saviour and called by the same grace.

We believe in Independency, but we need also to believe in Interdependency, especially in this day of “small things.”