

## *Autonomy of the Church & Priesthood of the Believer*

### **II. Autonomy of the Church**

*Independent* local church (*also includes separation of church and state*). This ‘belief’, as some would claim, is more than a position, but rather a Biblical truth. Building upon the first distinctive of Sole Authority of the Bible for faith and practice, it is clear to understand the church is obligated to the Word of God. The independent, autonomous church is a doctrine, not created by Baptist, but a basic, simple truth established by several Biblical truths.

- Biblical, local church settled their own problems – In [Acts 6](#), the principle of congregational government is as the church of Jerusalem ‘choose’ 7 men to be deacons. However, do not confuse this with a congregational voting and approving process. The congregation simply chose seven men with the qualifications of the servant (full faith and Holy Spirit-power). It was the Apostles who ‘approved’ these men. Ultimately, it is the spiritual leader of a church who will be held accountable for the church’s actions, therefore it is his responsibility to approve such matters. Concerning the topic of discussion, this is still something handled and controlled within the local, New testament church and not with a convention or incorporation.
  - The topic of outside recommendation is not against the autonomy of the church, whereas the Bible says “...**in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.**” ([Proverbs 11.4](#)). Take a small church or a mission church, it would not be out of the question to set up a committee of elder preachers to ‘choose’ a replacement pastor, should something quickly and tragically occur to the pastor. However, the best policy for a successor pastor is for the existing pastor to appoint him and allow him to train underneath him for a set period of time.
- Each church has an obligation to choose the best policies and leadership for carrying out the commands of Scripture. It is the responsibility of the pastor to supervise (original meaning of the word ‘bishop’) the carrying out of God’s command. All spiritual authority is in the Scripture, but the supervisory authority over the church program is in the hands of the pastor as God tells to pastor to take “...**the oversight thereof**” in the church ([I Peter 5.2](#))
  - [Hebrews 13.7](#)
  - [Hebrews 13.17](#)
    - These two verses are referring to pastors, whom we are to obey...
    - Paul reminds of this in [I Thessalonians 5.12](#)

- Luke reminds of this in [Acts 20.28](#)
- Voluntary fellowship and cooperation were obviously practiced by the church of the New Testament. This is important if the work of the Lord is to be carried out effectively.

Most passages in the Bible are referring to the local, *visible assemblies (ecclesia* – see Distinctive #VI) that exist on earth during the Church Age. All passages about the church refer to assembled believers (we will cover this more in the sixth distinctive).

- A New Testament Church is an assembly of baptised believers for the purpose of worship, fellowship and the fulfilling of the Great Commission ([Matthew 28.18-20](#); [Mark 16.15](#); [Luke 24.47](#).) The New testament pattern is for church members are baptised into the church by immersion.

## *Class 4*

### **III. Priesthood of Believers**

**I Peter 2.5** – The priesthood of all believers is the doctrine of each individual believer having the ability to go before the Lord freely as his own representative.

- We are invited as brethren in Christ to enter in to the ‘**holiest by the blood of Jesus Christ**’ ([Hebrews 10.19](#)).
- We are told, as read in [I Peter 2.5](#) we are an ‘**holy priesthood**’ thus allowing every child of God who has repented can ‘**come come boldly unto the throne of grace**’ ([Hebrews 4.16](#)).
- Most religions have specially appointed priest to represent them unto their god or to God – this was true in the Old Testament with Israel. However, the Holy Spirit of God now (Church Age) indwells in individual bodies of the redeemed ([I Corinthians 6.19](#)).
  - The temple veil was ripped in twain (two or separated) so that it would no longer separate the true believer from the Holy Spirit of God ([Mark 15.38](#)).
  - Baptist have led the way in calling attention to the glorious truth of the priesthood of each believer.

Every born again believer may pray directly to God through Jesus Christ, the High Priest, without human intercession. The Old Testament priest were the only ones who dared enter the presence of God (the \*Holy of Holies\* in the Temple). There was a ceremonial ‘washing’ or ‘cleansing’ that took place prior to doing so, however, today a born again believer is washed from sin through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ ([Revelation 1.5-6](#)). Therefore, as a born again believer, we can direct prayer unto God.

- **Particulars of Prayer:**
  - Prayer is Communion with God;
  - Prayer is worship by which believers fellowship with and petition God;
  - Prayer can be both public (*Acts 4.24-31*) and private (*Matthew 6.6*).
- **Privilege of Prayer**
  - The significance of the Temple veil was to separate the Holy of Holies from the other places in the temple and from others in general. Only the High Priest could enter. He and the veil operated as a mediator between the people and God. The veil was rent in twain (*Matthew 27.51*) at the crucifixion of Christ. Now there is only one mediator (*I Timothy 2.5*), our High Priest Jesus Christ – (*Hebrews 4.14-16*)
  - Every believer is a priest – **I Peter 2.5,9** and **Revelation 1.5-6**
- **Practice of Prayer**
  - A simple acrostic which is well known concerning the functionality of prayer spelling the word **ACTS** :
  - **Adoration** – Prayer is time praising and worshipping the Lord. (*Psalms 95.6*) Adoring Him for Who He is (**Matthew 6:9**, **Psalm. 103, 145, 150**; **Rev. 4:8; 5:12-14**).
  - **Confession** – Repentance from every known sin in your life (**Psalm 32.5**). Confession should be a part of your continual walk with Christ (**Matthew 6:9-13**). Spend time asking Christ to search your heart for areas that displease Him (**Psalm 139:23-24**). Allow God to cleanse your heart of any un-confessed sin (**Psalm 51:10-13**). Be sure to spend time confessing and repenting of (turn away from) specific sins (**I John 1:9**).
  - **Thanksgiving** – Giving thanks for all things should be a part of our everyday lives as God's people (**Philippians 4:6-7**). This includes thanking God for specific things such as blessings, people, open doors, guidance, etc. Also give thanks for His salvation and the privilege to serve such a wonderful Saviour. Thank Him for his goodness, loving-kindness, and faithfulness (see **Psalm 100:4-6**).
  - **Supplication** – We are called as believers to intercessory prayer (**Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 18:1; Colossians 4:2; I Timothy 2:1-4**). Thus, we are to come before God on behalf of others (**Hebrews 10:19-25; Rev. 1:4-6**). Spend time praying for specific people, events, states, countries, missionaries, etc. (**Acts 12:5; Rom. 10:1**). In addition, spend time praying for personal needs (**Matthew 6:11-13**).

- The practice of prayer is for God's glory (**II Corinthians 4.15; Hebrews 13.15**), part of Christian service (**Ephesians 6.18-20; II Thessalonians 3.1-2**) and for personal peace (**Philippians 4.6-7**)
- *Problems in Prayer*
  - Sin – **Psalm 66.18**
  - Doubt – **James 1.6-7**
  - Unforgiving spirit – **Mark 11.25**
  - Amiss (feigned or lustful) – **James 4.3**
  - Marital problems – **I Peter 3.7**
- As New Testament priest, we have the obligation to offer up prayer and praise to God – **I Peter 2.5**, to proclaim praises of God before others – **I Peter 2.9**. we are to serve as witnesses of God's glory in a dark world.