

# CONGREGATIONAL AUTONOMY

Def.: *self-rule. Applied to churches: congregational self-rule.*

(Strictly speaking: Christ rules in all churches. Eph.1:20-23)

Local rulers: elders, (synonymous with bishops, pastors, presbyters). Heb.13:17

*"[rule] among you"* 1Pe.5:2

*"in every city."* Tit.1:5

*"overseers"* of church in Ephesus. Act.20:28

## CONGREGATIONAL STRUCTURE

**Elder** (presbuteros) Act.20:17. Originally meant an older man, then one who by age and experience and wisdom has the capacity of overseeing.

**Presbytery** (presbuterion) 1Ti 4:14. (Form of the Greek word translated elder. Board of elders, or eldership.

**Bishop** (KJ) (episkope) 1Ti.3:1. Overseership. To superintend, guard, care for, watch over.

**Overseer** (episkopos) Act.20:28. (Same Greek word translated as bishop)

**Pastor** (poimen) Eph.4:11. One who tends, cares for, feeds, protects (as a shepherd).

**Shepherd** 1Pe.5:2 (piomen). (Same Greek word translated as pastor).

**Steward** (oikonomos). Lit., a house manager; metaphorically used to refer to those given charge of the "house of God." Tit.1:7

## CONGREGATIONAL OVERSIGHT

**Watch.** Counseling; guarding and protecting those under their charge from evil and error from without and from within; disciplining (including teaching); reproving, rebuking and exhorting.

**Rule.** Taking the oversight, assuming the lead. Insisting on a "thus-says-the-Lord" in matters of doctrine. In matters of judgment, doing what is expedient with due consideration for the flock.

**Lead.** Heb.13:17, not pushing; not demanding, but commanding. Not as lords, but leaders.

**Example.** Example in morals, ethics, work and service, faith and fidelity. Example in personal life involving family, occupation, community.

## SUMMATION

Qualified older men (**elders**) comprising a body of elders (**presbytery**) who superintend (**oversee**) the congregation of the Lord's people among them—caring for, feeding and protecting its members (shepherding, **pastoring**).

## LOCAL AUTONOMY

Doctrine (teachings) are to be found in the Word of God only. 2Ti.4:2

Elders are to hold to the "whole purpose of God." Act.20:27-32

All activity and teachings must be authorized by the Head. Col.3:17

Care and discipline of members by the elders are specifically detailed in Word.

Local rulers are given authority (duty) to care for His sheep "among them."

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES ARE AUTONOMOUS**

Bishops had the oversight of the members among them, not of a diocese.

Elders ruled with designated authority.

Pastors have no legislative power.

Each congregation functioned as complete unit. Phi.1:1

Each made their own decisions, judgments, and handled their own affairs, *but not in isolation*. 1Co.16:3

Congregations co-operated in aiding needy members in other areas. Act.11:29

Churches sent support to those spreading the word elsewhere. Phi.4:15

Members shared their material wealth with oppressed members of other congregations.  
1Co.16:1

Such co-operation is not to be used as grounds for meddling in affairs of another.

Matters of opinion or judgment; internal affairs are to be kept so.

No other eldership, or congregation, or preacher, has a voice in another church's affairs.

## **NO EXAMPLE OR HINT OF HIERARCHY**

Human reasoning begs for some type of structure (as Israel of old clamored for a king).

The very problems such structures are supposed to cure, only compound the problem.

## **THE WISDOM OF GOD IS EVIDENT**

One person, group of people, or church, are prevented from being dominate.

The spread of error is checked.

Decision-making kept close to the situation.