

The Independency

Of

The Local Church

By E. L. Bynum

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And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:21)

Pastor Landis asked me to preach on **The Independency Of The Local Church** in this Conference. This is a subject that I firmly believe in, because it is supported by the Scriptures.

I. THE MEANING OF INDEPENDENCE.

A. The definition of independence.

To find out the meaning of independence, we must turn to Webster's unabridged dictionary. It states, "**Independence**, The state or quality of being independent; freedom from the influence, control, or determination of another or others; self-maintenance or self-government." "**Independent**, Not dependent; not subject to the control, influence, or determination of another; not subordinate." "Not subject to bias, persuasion, or influence; self directing." "Free from the rule of another, controlling or governing oneself; self-governing." "Not connected or related to another, to each other, or to a group; separate, as, and independent grocer."

"**Independent**" as **NOUN**, "A person who believes that a local organized Christian church is or should be self-sufficient and not dependent on external ecclesiastical authority."

I certainly agree with Webster, especially in the use of independent as a noun.

B. What we DO NOT mean by independent!

When we speak of the local Church being independent, it is important that we make it clear what we **do not** mean.

We do not mean that we are to be independent of the teaching of the Bible.

We do not mean that we are to be independent of Christ the Head of the Church.

We do not mean that we are to be independent of the leadership of the

Holy Spirit.

Independent does not mean that we are to be in a state of disorganization.
Independent does not mean that we are to be without a plan or purpose.
Independent does not mean that we are to be in a state of anarchy.
Independent does not mean that we are to be isolationists.

Independent does not mean that we cannot fellowship with other churches and pastors of like faith and order.

Independent does not mean that we cannot cooperate together as equals, in supporting missionaries and doing Scriptural works. Independent Baptist Churches cannot and must not surrender their independence to any other Church, organization, Convention or board, etc.

II. THE HISTORICAL CASE FOR INDEPENDENT CHURCHES.

A. What reputable historians have said.

1. G. H. Orchard, an English Baptist pastor, wrote **A Concise of the Baptists**¹. It was published in London in 1838. Speaking of the 1st and 2nd centuries, he said, P. 22, *The Christian societies, instituted in the cities of the Roman empire, were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independency and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution.*

2. Orchard, says on P. 31, *...the churches for three centuries remained as originally formed, independent of each other, and were united by no tie but that of charity.* Again on P. 36, Orchard says, *During the first three centuries, Christian congregations, all over the East, subsisted in separate independent bodies, unsupported by government, and consequently without any secular power over one another. All this time they were Baptist churches....*

3. David Benedict wrote **History Of The Donatists**,² which was published in 1875. On page 138 he writes, *"A bishop," says Mosheim, "during the first and the second century, was a person who had the care of one Christian assembly. In this assembly he acted not so much, with the authority of a master, as with the zeal and diligence of a faithful servant. The churches in these early times were entirely independent; none of them were subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one was governed by its own rulers and its own laws."* "A church and a diocese," says archbishop Whately, *"seems to have been, for a considerable time, coextensive and identical; and each church or diocese, and consequently each superintendent, though connected with the rest by the ties of faith and hope and charity, seems to have been perfectly independent, as far as regards any power and control."* (Emphasis ours)

4. Orchard tells us how the churches began to lose their independence on p. 38, as he writes, *In 306 (A.D.), Constantine, surnamed the Great, was saluted emperor by the army, and the aspect of affairs towards the Christian church was soon changed; and in 325, the old corrupt interests were incorporated by an act of the emperor's from which union we dissent.*

He further writes, *In 251, there were forty-four Jewish Christian congregations in Rome. Till the time of Sylvester, the Christians had baptized either*

in private baths, or in subterranean waters, or in any place without the city. The emperor Constantine gave Bishop Sylvester the imperial mansion for a sort of parsonage-house: and here was erected the first artificial baptistery in Rome. From this period, at proper seasons of the year, all their catechumens went to be baptised at the Lateran baptistery. Other churches looked to the bishop, who presided over the Lateran congregation and the baptistery; consulted him about the times of baptism, or administering the ordinance, and the regulation of other ecclesiastical affairs. This mode of proceeding in consulting the bishop, led to the destruction of civil and religious liberty, and ruined the independency of the churches." (Emphasis ours).

5. It is highly significant, that the first successful attempt to take away the independency of the local churches was carried out through an unsaved Roman emperor by the name of Constantine. These churches in Rome ceased to even resemble scriptural churches. They became Roman Catholic churches. Since that time, many churches have lost their independency through submission to decrees of political leaders. In America this has come about through the organizing of Associations, Conventions, Boards, and Fellowships. Then they elect presidents, chairmen, boards, and committees to lord it over God's churches. (A committee is a board by a sweeter sounding name).

6. Let us look at the testimony of **Francis Wayland**, (1796-1865). He was born in New York City. He pastored First Baptist Church, Boston, Mass., and First Baptist Church, Providence. He was, for 28 years, President of Brown University. He wrote a number of books, including the 336 page, **Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches**³, originally published in 1857. On page 177, and 178, he wrote, *The Baptists have ever believed in the entire and absolute independence of the churches. By this, we mean that every church of Christ, that is, every company of believers united together according to the laws of Christ, is wholly independent of every other; that every church is perfectly capable of self-government; and that, therefore, no one acknowledges any higher authority, under Christ, than itself; that with the church all ecclesiastical action commences, and with it terminates, and hence, that the ecclesiastical relations proper, of every member, are limited to the church to which he belongs.*

On page 181, he states, *It would seem, from these simple principles, impossible that a church of Christ can be in any proper and legitimate sense represented.* (Emphasis his). *We have nothing to submit to representatives. We have no representatives to whom any thing is to be submitted. I will go further, and add, that what can not be done properly and legitimately must not be done improperly and illegitimately. It is as truly a violation of the independence of the churches, and the right of private judgment, when several hundred brethren meet in some public convention, and manufacture public opinion, and adopt courses which their brethren are called upon to follow, on pain of the displeasure of the majority, as when they establish a formal representation, to whose decisions all the constituency must submit.*

On page 182, Wayland wrote, *Jesus Christ left his church without any general organization. Throughout the New Testament we can discover not a trace of organization beyond the establishment of individual churches. Their bond of union was sympathy with him through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each individual. It is not probable that as he left it, so he intended that it should continue to the end of time?* (Emphasis ours). *The object of the church of Christ on earth is very simple: it is the conversion of souls. This object, it seems to me, can be accomplished without the use of the complicated, cumbrous, and frequently soul-destroying machinery, with which his disciples have for many ages been burdened.*

Wayland was also with us who believe in missionaries being sent out through the agency of the Church, and not through a board. In 1859, he wrote, **Thoughts on the Missionary Organizations of the Baptist Denomination**. In it, Wayland stated, *The more I have reflected on the subject, the more obvious has it seemed to me, that preaching Christ to the heathen must be a more simple business than is commonly supposed. There were no missionary boards and no central organizations in the times of the Apostles, and yet they labored with an efficiency that turned the world upside down; and why should we need such organization now?*

7. John Quincy Adams was born in 1825 in Philadelphia, PA, and pastored churches in New Jersey and New York. He wrote the 179 page book, **Baptists Thorough Reformers**⁴. On page 153, he wrote, *The primitive churches were independent in their government. All the members were on an equality in each church, and each church was on the same equality with every other church. There were no bishops, in the sense in which that term is used by Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Methodists. There were no church sessions, presbyteries, assemblies, synods, or conferences. (And I might add there were no associations, conventions, organized fellowships, or mission boards or committees -ELB). Advisory councils, having no power to legislate, were sometimes called to give counsel in difficult matters. But individual churches possessed supreme authority to administer discipline, and transact their own business. The church was the highest court of appeal.* (Emphasis ours).

8. T. H. Pritchard (born 1832) pastored a number of Baptist Churches. He also was president of Wake Forrest College. He authored one of the chapters in the book, **Baptist Doctrines**⁵. This 630 page book was edited by Charles A. Jenkins. On page 305 Pritchard wrote, *As to church government, we believe that each separate and individual church is entirely independent of all other churches, persons and bodies of men, either civil or ecclesiastical, and is to be governed by its own members alone, without aid or interference of any other person or persons whatever. Consequently, churches governed by popes, bishops, synods, presbyteries, conferences, or in any other way than by their own members directly and exclusively, are not constituted on*

the model of the primitive churches, nor governed according to the gospel rule. (Emphasis ours).

9. **Baptist Doctrines**⁵ (published 1890) also has a chapter called **The Independence Of The Churches**, written by J. A. Smith, Chicago IL. On p. 230, Smith writes, *Church independency is, in Baptist belief and practice, a fundamental principle... The Church of Christ is a local Christian society. This point is so far implied in what is said elsewhere in this volume, in setting forth the characteristics of the apostolical churches, as to make it unnecessary for us to go at length into the Scriptural proof. It must suffice to say, here, that in no usage of the word "church," in any part of the New Testament, can the smallest authority be found for any other species of organism than the Christian society, made up of baptized believers, meeting in one place for worship, the administration of the ordinance and for the hearing of the word.*

He further writes on p. 231, *The local church...is in every respect, complete. Its official appointments, pastors and deacons, are all for which the New Testament rule provides. Its functions, as a Christian organism, are complete in its local and independent form. Every detail of administration, whether official, disciplinary, or in any other sense executive, is comprehended in what is assigned to the local church. There is, in short, in the New Testament conception of the church, no point at which one church can officially interpose in the affairs of another without unauthorized intrusion, nor any point at which supplementary organization can be attached, without encumbering the beautiful simplicity of New Testament order, and changing to complication and confusion what the Lord himself intended to be a unit and a harmony.*

Smith writes on p. 234, *By the historical value of the principle of church independency, we mean the place it fills in historical Christianity. It is not too much to say that the enormous mischief inherent in and proceeding from the great Antichristian apostasy had their root in a departure from this principle, and that no efficient cure for these mischiefs has ever been found short of a return to primitive Christian simplicity in this regard. (We say AMEN!)*

B. Where did the other organizations come from?

Earlier we quoted Orchard, as to how the Roman Churches lost their independence and their identity as New Testament Churches. There were other attempts to impose some kind of organizational power over Baptist Churches. These attempts failed for the most part. For over a thousand years Baptists churches, under different names, carried on their work, sent out missionaries and spread throughout many nations. They did this without mission boards, conventions, unions, associations, or organized fellowships. If you want more information on this, I heartily recommend, **LOCAL CHURCH MISSIONS, A Doctrine And Practice Manual**⁶, by Charles K. Johnson. (Order from Tabernacle Baptist Church, P.O. Box 3100, Lubbock, TX 79452)

John T. Christian wrote, **A History of the Baptists**⁷, (two volumes). In vol. 1, page 313, he wrote, *The formation of Baptist Associations may be traced to the period of the Civil Wars (not to be confused by the American Civil War) and they were developed in the last half of the seventeenth century. He further states, The idea of an association seems to have originated with the particular Baptists. The London Confession of Faith of 1643, article XLVII seems to anticipate an association. On page 314, he says, But while the idea of associations originated with the Particular Baptists, the General Baptists were the first to organize. He further states, The General Baptists, like the Particular Baptists, held the idea of the Independency of the Churches, but their General Conference was more Presbyterian in its legislation. By their connection with the Anabaptists and the Mennonites of the Continent, and their stay at Amsterdam, they obtained knowledge of the Presbyterian Synods of the churches of Luther and Calvin.*

This gives us a clear view of the origin of these unscriptural organizations. The ideas may be traced back to Luther and Calvin, and their ideas may be traced back to the Church of Rome.

According to **The Baptist Encyclopedia**⁸, the Somerset Association in England, was formed about 1653. It was followed by a number of Associations in that country.

C. The formation of extra-scriptural organizations in America.

The Baptist Encyclopedia⁸, by William Cathcart (published 1881) traces the history of the Associations in America. On page 46, it reads, *The Philadelphia Association was formally established in 1707, and it has lived and flourished ever since.* He then lists 15 Baptist Associations that were formed in the 1700's in America. No doubt much of this was done by sincere and good men who thought they were doing the right thing. However, this does not make it right, for there is no Scriptural authority for such organizations.

1. These 15 Associations originated in the 1700's, about 1700 years after Jesus organized the local church.

2. The Triennial Convention was organized on May 18, 1814. This was to be the mother of the Northern Baptist Convention (now American Baptist Convention), and the Southern Baptist Convention.

3. In May, 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention was organized. This was over 1800 years after Jesus organized His local Church.

4. In March, 1905, what is now the American Baptist Association was formed. Almost 1900 years after Jesus set up His local Church.

5. In 1950, the Baptist Missionary Association was formed. This was over 1900 years after Jesus Christ organized His local Church.

6. In 1932, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches was

formed. This was about 1900 years after Jesus started His local church.

7. In 1923, the Baptist Bible Union of America was formed. Although this organization did not last long. It was to be the forerunner of both the World Baptist Fellowship, and the Baptist Bible Fellowship. It was almost 1900 years after the local Church was organized by Jesus Christ.

8. In the 1930's the World Baptist Fellowship had its beginning, at least 1900 years after Jesus organized His local Church.

9. In 1950 the Baptist Bible Fellowship came into existence. This was over 1900 years after Jesus organized His local independent Baptist Church.

MY QUESTIONS! How did Baptist churches survive, thrive, and multiply for over 1600 years without organized Associations? How did they exist for over 1800 years without conventions? How did they accomplish so much for 1900 years without organized fellowships?

III. THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR THE INDEPENDENCY OF THE CHURCH.

1. The Divine Head of the local Church is Jesus Christ, and this Church can only have one head.

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, (Ephesians 1:22)

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. (Ephesians 5:23)

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18)

The headquarters of the Church must be where the Head is, and He is in heaven. The Church has no right to join any organization, be it Association, Convention, or Fellowship. We cannot do so, and still be in submission to Christ. The Head of the Church never mentioned any of these organizations.

2. The Divine Architect planned the local Church. No where in His plan, is to be found a place for these organizations.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly

places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (Ephesians 3:8-11)

The Church is a building, and it is the only religious building we have on this earth.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

3. The Divine Builder constructed the local Church, and nothing is said in the Bible about Him building these other organizations.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

4. The Divine Purchaser Purchased paid for it.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (Acts 20:28)

5. The Divine Teacher instructed it.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

6. The Divine Godhead sustains it.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:20)

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18)

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:21)

CONCLUSION: Men stumble at the simple plan of salvation. Even so

they stumble at the simplicity of the Church. **Man wants something bigger, greater, and more elaborate than God planned. This is not God's way!!**

If the Divine architect did not plan it, and the Divine builder did not build it, and the Divine purchaser did not purchase it, and the Divine teacher did not instruct it, THEN THE DIVINE HEAD DOES NOT RECOGNIZE IT, NOR WILL THE DIVINE GODHEAD SUSTAIN IT.

The greatest mission work was done in the history of Christianity in the FIRST CENTURY without an Association, Convention, Fellowship, Mission Board or Mission Committee. The Roman Empire was evangelized without them. If they didn't need them then, then we don't need them today.

We have the truth, let us cleave to it with all our might, and proclaim it with all our strength, until Jesus Christ our Savior comes.

¹**A Concise History Of Baptists**, by G. H. Orchard, republished 1956, by Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, Lexington, Kentucky.

²**History Of The Donatists**, by David Benedict, Memorial Edition, printed for Maria M. Benedict, Providence, R.I., 1875.

³**Notes On The Principles And Practices Of Baptist Churches**, by Francis Wayland, originally published in New York in 1857 by Sheldon, Blakeman and Co. Reprinted 1988 by Baptist Heritage Press, Watertown, WI.

⁴**Baptists The Only Thorough Reformers**, by John Quincy Adams, Centennial Edition, originally published in New York in 1876. Republished in 1980 by Backus Book Publishers, Rochester, N.Y.

⁵**Baptist Doctrines**, Edited by Charles A. Jenkins, originally published in St. Louis in 1890, Reprinted 1989 by Baptist Heritage Press, Watertown, WI.

⁶**Local Church Missions, A Doctrine And Practice Manual**, by Charles K. Johnson. published 1984, by Tabernacle Baptist Church, Lubbock, Texas.

⁷**A History Of The Baptists**, by John T. Christian, (2 Vol.) published by Bogard Press, Texarkana, Ark.-Tex.

⁸**The Baptist Encyclopedia**, by William Cathcart, 1881, republished by The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., Paris, Arkansas.