**Authority of God**

**Local Church Autonomy**

Jesus built his church (Mt. 28:18), there is only one (Eph. 4:4), He gave himself for it (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:25) and He is the head of it (Eph. 1:22). Thus the universal church is simply all saved people with Christ as its head. There is no earthly structure for the universal church and no earthly headquarters. Nowhere in scripture is there authorization for attempting to activate the church universal.

A local church is simply a group of Christians in a particular locality, banded together to work and worship. Active churches are local churches, under the oversight of elders with deacons to serve, (Phil. 1:1). They fellowship in preaching the gospel (Phil. 4:15-16), edifying one another (Eph. 4:12; Acts 20:7) and assisting other saints who are in need (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The local church as God designed it is fully sufficient to accomplish everything God intended.

Many are not satisfied doing the work God has commanded, following the pattern He has given us. They in their infinite “wisdom” have devised grandiose schemes resulting in a total disregard for the divine pattern. Examples include:

**Hierarchies and Centralized Organizations**

Catholicism and Protestant Denominationalism alike have succumbed to the overpowering human tendency to organize. Their structural designs for the universal church fly in the face of plain New Testament teaching and they operate such organizations without divine authority.

**Church Support of Human Institutions**

While the New Testament authorizes local churches carrying out their own work independently, some elders have determined to turn over part of their responsibilities, along with their some of the church’s money to the board of directors of a human institution, surrendering their oversight responsibilities in the process. Some of the work being supported is authorized work (preaching the gospel) and some is not (secular education, general benevolence). Again, systems developed and operated without God’s authority dishonor Him and glorify only the men who invented them.

**Sponsoring Church Arrangement**

One way to plan grand projects too large for the local church, yet avoid the use of human institutions is to arrange for many churches to send funds to a “sponsoring church”. The elders of the sponsoring church design the project, plan the details, execute the plan and provide the oversight. Sounds like a plan. What could possibly be wrong with an arrangement like that?

All of these human inventions have one thing in common: They all violate God’s pattern for the autonomy of the local church. In Acts 20:28, Paul admonished elders to “be on guard for yourselves and for all the ***flock, among which*** the Holy Spirit has made you overseers”. Peter concurred when he wrote for elders to “shepherd the ***flock of God among you***, exercising oversight…” (1 Pet. 5:2). Any scheme allowing someone outside the local church to usurp part of the oversight of the church’s work violates God’s pattern. Any scheme that gives the elders of a local church oversight of work beyond the “flock of God among them” is greater oversight than God intended. The only way to honor and glorify God is to do *what* He has authorized *in the ways* He has authorized. The local church under the oversight of its elders and with the service of its deacons is sufficient to accomplish all the work God has given it to do.